Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers (2019 – 2026)

Phase Three – Interim Report

July 2024

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Acknowledgements

The authors again wish to thank all participants of the *Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers*. For five years they have been generous with their time, and open and thoughtful in helping us to understand their volunteer journey.

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About UTS

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Citation

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Glossary

AAD	Approved accompanying dependant. A partner of a volunteer who accompanies the volunteer during their assignment and who is supported by the program (including participating in VPLJ activities) but who does not have a formal paid or unpaid position
Alumni network	Formal network of past volunteers with the Australian Volunteers Program, managed by Australian Volunteers International
AVI	Australian Volunteers International
AVP	Australian Volunteer Program, referred to in this document as 'the program' unless quoted by respondents
Career Breakers	One of seven categories of participants delineated in this project based on the participants' motivations for volunteering and how these intersected with their career. *Career Breakers* view a volunteer assignment as an interlude to a career that may be returned to after the volunteer assignment is completed, but which – at the time of accepting the assignment - is not fulfilling the individual's needs (taking a temporary and meaningful hiatus from an ongoing career)
CALD	Culturally and linguistically diverse
COVID	Coronavirus disease (COVID-19). "COVID" is used in this report to refer to all interruptions to the program and participants as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic
Enhancers	One of seven categories of participants delineated in this project based on the participants' motivations for volunteering and how these intersected with their career. *Enhancers* view a volunteer assignment as a means to consciously develop or enhance a career through the acquisition of skills, experiences, opportunities, and/or networks (progressing a career through a meaningful and developmental experience)
HCN	Host country national - A "local" person from the country that hosted participants' volunteer assignment
ICMT	In-country management team
ICOP	In-country orientation program - A formal information and training program undertaken by participants after their arrival in the host country and prior to commencing their volunteer assignment
Imposed Transitioners	One of seven categories of participants delineated in this project based on the participants' motivations for volunteering and how these intersected with their career. For *Imposed Transitioners*, a volunteer assignment occurs in response to a negative career experience (e.g., labour market conditions) that leads the individual to consider a new profession or context (undertaking a meaningful alternative to domestic work with career possibilities)
INGO	International non-governmental organisation
Launchers	One of seven categories of participants delineated in this project based on the participants' motivations for volunteering and how these intersected with their career. *Launchers* view of the assignment as a stepping-stone to launch a career, most commonly in a sector or profession that allows them to express their values, such as international development or humanitarian aid (integrating values into a meaningful career)
LQI	Longitudinal qualitative interviews – An approach to longitudinal data collection that involves a series of interviews on a particular topic or experience. LQIs combine identical questions posed at different times to assess change (e.g., engagement with development issue), as well as questions that target particular experiences as indicators of causality
LSAV	Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers (2019-26)
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
Non-working Partner	One of seven categories of participants delineated in the study based on the participants' motivations for volunteering and how these intersected with their career. The participants from this group accompanied a partner on an international volunteer assignment as an approved accompanying dependant (experiencing a vicarious assignment and adventure)
Participant	A respondent who participated in any part of the Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers (2019-26)
PDB	Pre-departure briefing - A formal information and training seminar provided by the program to all participants in Australia before their deployment to the host country and prior to the commencement of their volunteer assignment
PD	Position description – a written description outlining the formal duties and responsibilities of the volunteers' role with the partner organisation
PO	Partner organisation – the organisation in the host country with which volunteers worked during their volunteer assignment
Program	Australian Volunteers Program
Repatriated participant	Participants who were repatriated to Australia due to the COVID pandemic prior to completing their planned assignment
Remote volunteering	An international volunteer role that involves the volunteer providing support for a PO online rather than being based in the host country
SBIO volunteering	Voluntary service that is skills-based and internationally-oriented (i.e., volunteers utilise their professional knowledge or capabilities in some or all of their voluntary role, and some or all of the voluntary service focuses on international issues or beneficiaries, including CALD beneficiaries in domestic settings)
SDG	The United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals
T1-T4	Time periods 1 to 4, denoting the four interviews conducted with participants at different times across the study's duration: T1 = May to August 2019, prior to or soon after participants commenced their assignment, T2 = September 2019 to April 2020, at the completion of the volunteer assignment, T3 = December 2020 to April 2021, 12 months after the assignment, and T4 = March to May 2023.
Transitioners	One of seven categories of participants delineated in this project based on the participants' motivations for volunteering and how these intersected with their career. *Transitioners* view a volunteer assignment as a pathway to enter a new sector or context, most commonly with an international - rather than domestic – focus (entering a new sector or context that provides meaning)
Veterans	One of seven categories of participants delineated in this project based on the participants' motivations for volunteering and how these intersected with their career. *Veterans* view a volunteer assignment as an opportunity to apply professional expertise accumulated through a long career in order to achieve a positive outcome (applying career expertise toward a meaningful purpose)
VPLJ	Volunteer Professional Learning Journey - A series of structured activities provided by the program that is intended to support volunteers' learning and success during the assignment. It includes pre-departure briefing (PDBs), in-country orientation programs (ICOPs), and other organised events.

Executive Summary

The *Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers* (LSAV) aims to explicate whether, why and how participating in the *Australian Volunteers Program* (the program) influences volunteers personally and professionally in relation to four outcome areas: (i) civic engagement and international development literacy, (ii) global literacy and connections, (iii) career progression and professional capabilities, and (iv) personal circumstances and capabilities. The study is tracking a cohort of 50 Australians who in 2019 commenced assignments in 16 countries. Assignments were curtailed in March 2020 at the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Data are being collected via periodic semi-structured interviews prior to, during, and after their volunteer assignment.

This interim report outlines findings of the study's fourth round of interviews (T4), focusing on the period 2021-2023 that bridges the second wave of the pandemic and the initial post-pandemic period.

This was a time of great change for many of the study's participants. One valued participant died. Others underwent dramatic personal and professional changes that include marrying, becoming first-time parents or grandparents, ending or starting relationships or jobs, relocating to new countries, cities or States, undergoing major surgery, overcoming health setbacks and economic hardships, and taking on demanding new caring responsibilities.

Against this background, most participants reflect favourably on their volunteer experiences, and all are benefitting in some way from personal and/or professional impacts of their assignments. For some these have been transformational. Although some benefits are unevenly distributed, these are evident not just in participants' reflections, evaluations and descriptions of their experiences across the course of the study, but also in objective changes in their careers and lives in the three years since their assignment finished.

The interviews in 2023 (T4) produced emerging evidence that, among other outcomes:

- Volunteers' civic participation has expanded in impact and scope since their assignment through being more skills-based and internationally-oriented - a consequence, in part, of interests generated, skills gained, or relationships formed whilst volunteering
- Volunteers retain positive feelings towards and connections with their host country, despite these atrophying for some since their assignment ended. Their in-country experience and the program support (including VPLJ activities) have contributed in important ways to volunteers being more globally oriented and informed through changes in their outlook, friendship groups, interests, and cross-cultural proficiencies, which they continue to apply and benefit from in work and civic service
- The program offers opportunities for many professional benefits by providing the context for volunteers to increase professional confidence, develop professional knowledge and capabilities for some roles, and access professional opportunities, including by testing or stimulating interest in new career pathways. The strongest professional benefits have been realised by young volunteers who entered the program with career-related motivations
- The personal changes catalysed by the learning-intensive context of the volunteer assignment may be impactful in ways that manifest more slowly than other outcomes and that some volunteers find difficult to explain. Their ongoing relationships with like-minded volunteers continue to be a central feature of the volunteer experience for many.

An emerging area of relevance to volunteers' outcomes is their capacity to reflect on their experiences both *during* their assignments, as a sensemaking and adaptation process, and *after* their assignment, as a way to continue developing and benefitting from their experiences (and sharing this with others). Structured frameworks may help to guide this process and so make the personal and professional impacts more salient to volunteers and easier to act upon during and after their assignment.

More thorough key findings and emerging implications can be found at:

- **Panel 1**, which distils participants' accounts of the major ways that their experiences are impacting them now, including by volunteer type (pages 6-8)
- **Section 3.6**, which summarises key findings and emerging implications on civic engagement and international development literacy (pages 23-25)
- **Section 4.5,** which summarises key findings and emerging implications on global literacy and connections (pages 38-40)
- **Section 5.4,** which summarises key findings and emerging implications on career progression and professional capabilities (pages 58-59)
- **Section 6.6,** which summarises key findings and emerging implications on personal circumstances and capabilities (pages 73-74)

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PART I: Study Overview

1 Introduction and Background

1.1 Introduction

This report presents interim results of Phase Three of the research project, *Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers* (LSAV). The project is being undertaken by a research team at UTS Business School and the School of International Studies and Education, University of Technology Sydney, for the Australian Volunteers Program ('the program').

The report contains three parts:

1. Part I: Study Overview – Outline of the LSAV's background and research aims, and the methodology underpinning Phase Three.
2. Part II: Volunteers' Personal and Professional Changes – Key features of changes in volunteers' personal and professional lives to date from their participation in the program along four dimensions: civics, global/international, professional, and personal.
3. Part III: Key Interim Findings and Implications – Summary of the main findings arising from Phase Three to date, noting implications for program and for the remainder of the study.

The report's contents build on the findings of Phases One and Two (2019-2021). These have been detailed in two prior reports: (i) Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers: Phase One Final Report (October 2019), and Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers 2019-2021: Final Report (April 2022).

This report complements a summary report outlining key implications to date of this phase of the project, presented to program staff on 20 November 2023.

1.2 Background and Context

The LSAV is a longitudinal research project commencing in April 2019 that aims to **explicate in a credible and persuasive way whether, why and how participating in the program influences volunteers personally and professionally in ways that are relevant to the program's objectives.** For the purposes of this research:

- *'Participating in the program'* is defined as all aspects of contact and involvement that volunteers have with the program including pre-departure (e.g., recruitment, selection and preparation), during the assignment, and post-assignment (e.g., support from the program). It includes all the volunteers' work and non-work experiences that arise from their involvement in the program.
- '*Personally and professionally'* is defined as all volunteers' work and non-work behaviours, capabilities and attitudes that lead to outcomes relevant to the program.
- '*Outcomes relevant to the program's objectives'* are those relating to or associated with one or more of the following areas of volunteers' lives as identified in the program's *MEL Framework* and objectives, and articulated in the study's operational framework[1]: (i) civic participation, engagement and literacy (civic), (ii) global literacy and connections (international), (iii) career progression and professional capabilities (professional), and (iv) personal circumstances and capabilities (personal).

The LSAV's results are intended to contribute to the program's objectives that "Australian volunteers gain professionally and personally" and that "volunteers (current and returned) promote greater cultural awareness and build stronger connections between partner countries and Australia." Through this, the study supports the program in helping to meet the Australian Government objective that Australians be more globally literate and connected.

The findings of the LSAV address the following key evaluation questions relating to the effectiveness of the program (MEL Framework):

1. What have been the outcomes/results (intended and unintended, positive and negative) of the program for volunteers?
2. To what extent has the program contributed to these outcomes?

2 Research Aims and Design

2.1 Objectives and Research Questions

» Overarching Research Objectives (LSAV)

1. To identify the nature of personal and professional changes in participants across the study period that are relevant to the program (i.e. civic, international, professional and personal);
2. To offer explanations for these changes, drawing on participants' experiences with and reflections on the program before, during and after their assignments; and
3. To identify ways that the program can improve its interactions with and support for volunteers (and accompanying dependents) across the volunteer lifecycle to increase their personal and professional benefits.

» Overarching Research Question (LSAV)

(How and why) does volunteers' participation in the program influence them personally and professionally in ways that are relevant to the program's objectives?

2.2 Research Design

The research design for the LSAV is primarily inductive. Data collection centres on interpretive longitudinal qualitative interviews (LQIs) with individual participants across multiple waves that encompass pre-, during- and post-assignment phases.[2] Each interview addresses both 'time-specific' factors relating to a particular phase of the participants' involvement with the program, as well as 'replicated' questions relating to experiences and outcomes apposite to the program (e.g., levels of civic engagement and career status). Through this, the study provides qualitatively rich descriptions of participants' experiences that allows changes in attitudes, behaviours and capabilities to be unearthed, and possible explanations for these to be explored through interpretive dialogue with research participants.

All procedures have been pre-approved by *UTS Human Research Ethics Committee* (HREC-ETH 23-7954).

2.3 Sample Recruitment and Composition

Fifty-five participants were initially recruited from pre-departure briefings (PDBs) in 2019 in accordance with an approved recruitment and engagement strategy.[3] The approved approach ensured participants' identities were not disclosed to the program or in any publication without their prior approval. It also specified protocols to protect the confidentiality of all data collected during the study.

Strategies were used to encourage a diversity of participants (e.g., age, family status, rurality) and assignments (e.g., host country), and to encourage their retention across multiple waves of data collection. As **Table 1** shows, one participant discontinued in Phase Two (T3) and four more in Phase Three (T4). Fifty participants - 45 volunteers and five "approved accompanying dependants" (AADs) - have provided data to date at four points in time. This represents a retention rate of 91% across the LSAV's first four years.

Table 1: Participant retention (T1-T4)

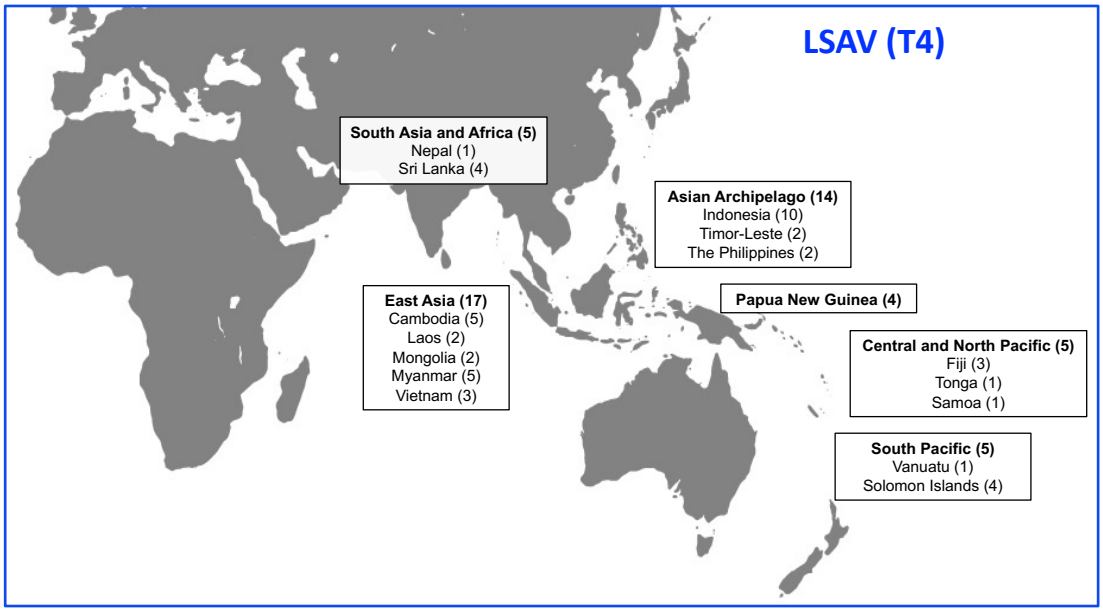
Number of participants	T1 (2019)		T2 (2020)		T3 (2021)		T4 (2023)	
	Total	Gender identity F-M-N	**Total**	Gender identity F-M-N	**Total**	Gender identity F-M-N	**Total**	Gender identity F-M-N
All participants	**55**	35-19-1	**55**	35-19-1	**54**	35-18-1	**50**	33-16-1
Volunteers	**50**	32-17-1	**50**	32-17-1	**49**	32-16-1	**45**	30-14-1
Approved accompanying dependants	**5**	3-2-0	**5**	3-2-0	**5**	3-2-0	**5**	3-2-0

Gender identity: ''F' = Female, M' = Male, 'N' = Prefer to self-identify.

The 55 participants at T1 undertook assignments ranging from 61 to 293 days, in 16 countries, hosted by 48 different partner organisations (POs). A précis of these assignments and the initial sample's demographic characteristics is presented in **Attachment 1** and detailed in the report, Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers: Phase One Final Report (October 2019).

Figure 1 shows the host countries of all 50 participants who participated in T4 interviews.

Figure 1: Location of participants' volunteer assignments (T4)



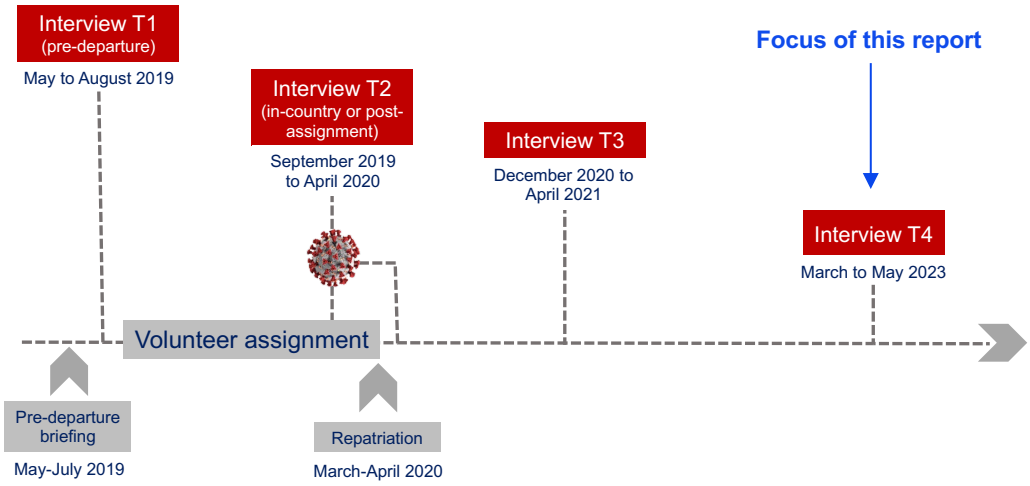
Eighteen participants (36%) had completed previous international volunteer assignments. Twenty-three (46%) had lived abroad previously. Three (6%) reported having a disability. **Attachment 2** and **Attachment 3**, meanwhile, list the main characteristics of participants continuing involvement in the study (n = 50) at the group level (**Attachment 2**) and individual level (**Attachment 3**). Numerous statistical comparisons showed the LSAV sample to be broadly representative of recent program volunteers.[4] Analysis of the five participants leaving the LSAV since it commenced reveal no significant differences between them and remaining participants on demographic or assignment features.

2.4 Data Collection and Analysis

Phases One and Two of the LSAV encompassed the first three LQIs conducted in 2019 (T1), 2020 (T2), and 2021 (T3). Phase Three continues the core research design and procedures used in Phases One and Two. It involves two waves of interviews: 2023 (T4) and 2025 (T5). This interim report focuses on the results of the first of these interviews.

Figure 2 presents a timeline of the data collection schedule for all four waves of the LSAV. As it shows, T4 interviews were conducted between 17 March and 11 May 2023, approximately two years after T3 interviews. Thus, the data collected at T4 focuses on, although is not confined to, the influence of participants' volunteer assignment and post-assignment experiences on their lives in the period 2021-23.

Figure 2: Overview of data collection (T1-T4)



Interviews were based on a schedule developed by the research team and approved by the program. **Table 2** summarises key themes of each interview. A detailed interview schedule and an overview of the research design for T4 can be found at **Attachment 4**.[5] Prior to being interviewed, participants received information sheets and signed consent forms.

Table 2: Summarised interview schedule (T1-T4)

Theme	T1	T2	T3	T4
Personal details: Demographic and background information including motivations for and expectations of the volunteer assignment	X			
In-country experiences: Anticipated (T1), actual (T2) and reflections on these (T3-T4)	X	X	X	X
Current situation, capabilities and attitudes in relation to main study outcomes: Civic, international, professional and personal	X	X	X	X
Program contact and support: Contact with program staff and support mechanisms	X	X	X	X
Future Plans: Future personal and professional plans (5 years)	X	X	X	X
Personal and professional changes: Perceived changes in attitudes, behaviours and capabilities, and the main reasons for these		X	X	X
Reflections: Reflections on changes (impact of program)			X	X

Electronic transcriptions of all interviews are the main empirical materials produced for analysis in the LSAV. These materials are stored using protocols approved by UTS Human Research Ethics Committee and consistent with UTS "Guidelines for the Management of Research Data."

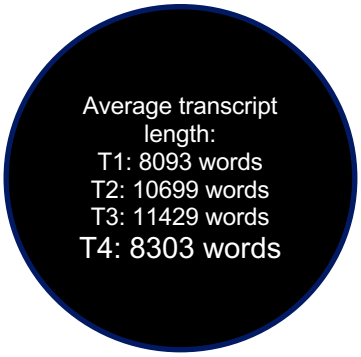
Analytical procedures in Phase Three mirrored those used in Phases One and Two, as outlined in the reports Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers: Phase One Final Report (October 2019) and Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers 2019-2021: Final Report (April 2022).

Consistent with earlier reports, a multi-dimensional analytical approach was used that combined longitudinal analysis (comparing changes of individuals and groups across time periods) and cross-sectional analysis (comparing different patterns of responses between groups based on demographic, professional and assignment characteristics).

One prominent frame used in the LSAV's analytical procedures is a classification of seven volunteer "types" based on the way that participants' motivations for volunteering intersected with their careers at the start of their volunteer assignments (T1). **Attachment 5** summarises features of the seven volunteer types. Details of the development of this model can be found in Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers: Phase One Final Report (October 2019).

As with previous reports, participants were provided a summarised draft version of this report, approved by program staff, and invited to provide comment or feedback. Just three responses (and a small number of informal acknowledgements) were received. These three comments, listed verbatim below, were discussed with program staff at a sensemaking workshop on 25 June 2024. None led to changes to the draft report.

- *"Sorry for replying late, busy busy as always! I think the rport rings true to my short assignment before COVID and to my other volunteer assignments. Well done and thank you again. I look forward to talking again next time."*
- *"Looks fair and comprehensive."*
- *"Thank you for sharing this important work. I can see the effort into it. The report covers most of the things that we discussed well. It s important to stress the humungous influence that the volunteer's position and the po can make to what can be achieved. Some expectations are not realistic but we try our best. The volunteer stories are brilliant! More please!"*



PART II: Volunteers' Personal and Professional Changes

Panel 1 on pages 6-8 summarises participants' overall experiences with the program to date**.**

» Biggest Overall Impacts on Participants to Date and the Main Experiences Contributing to These

As with previous interviews, participants were asked to identify the major impacts on them to date from their involvement with the program, and the main contributions to these.

Some participants were quick to identify (sometimes multiple) main impacts and were clear in attributing specific events, experiences or people to these. Others found identifying impacts or explaining these more difficult. In general, at T4 participants tended to be more certain in attributing professional outcomes and less categorical about the nature and causes of personal changes, an issue discussed further in Section 6.6.

Participants' accounts of the biggest impacts on them and the contributions to these at T4 were triangulated with responses to identical questions at T2 and T3.[6]

The pie chart at the top of page 6 (**Panel 1**) summarises the proportion of participants who reported each of the four main outcome areas as the biggest impact on them to date from their involvement in the program. As it shows, 40% of participants believed the biggest impacts to date have been 'Personal', with smaller numbers identifying 'Professional' (26%), 'International;' (26%) and 'Civic' (8%).

In general, women and younger respondents were more likely than men and older respondents to report that their assignments were impactful (i.e., had a large impact on them). Women were more likely than men to identify 'Professional' outcomes as the major impact.[7]

The pie chart also identifies the nature of the main impacts identified within each of these four areas.

The table below this summarises the main experiences that participants believed contributed most strongly to each of the four categories of outcomes.

» Participants' Overall Experiences with the Program by Volunteer Type

Although each participants' individual experiences differed, the table on pages 7-8 of **Panel 1** summarises the experiences of participants reported by the seven volunteer types summarised in **Attachment 5**. These are numbered from 1-6, from the volunteer group with the youngest average participant age (*Launchers*) to the oldest (*Veterans*). *Non-working partners* (7) accompanied a partner on a volunteer assignment but did not volunteer themselves.

The table summarises key experiences and personal and professional outcomes common to each group.

Many participants entered program looking for meaning and/or personal or professional change. Unexpected challenges, unprepared POs, poorly designed positions, and premature repatriations due to the COVID pandemic dampened some participants' experiences. Nonetheless, although not all have realised their pre-departure objectives to date, most participants have made progress towards these. An overwhelming majority have found their involvement with the program rewarding and developmental. All 50 report the experience as being generally positive and expressed gratitude for aspects of their volunteer experience.

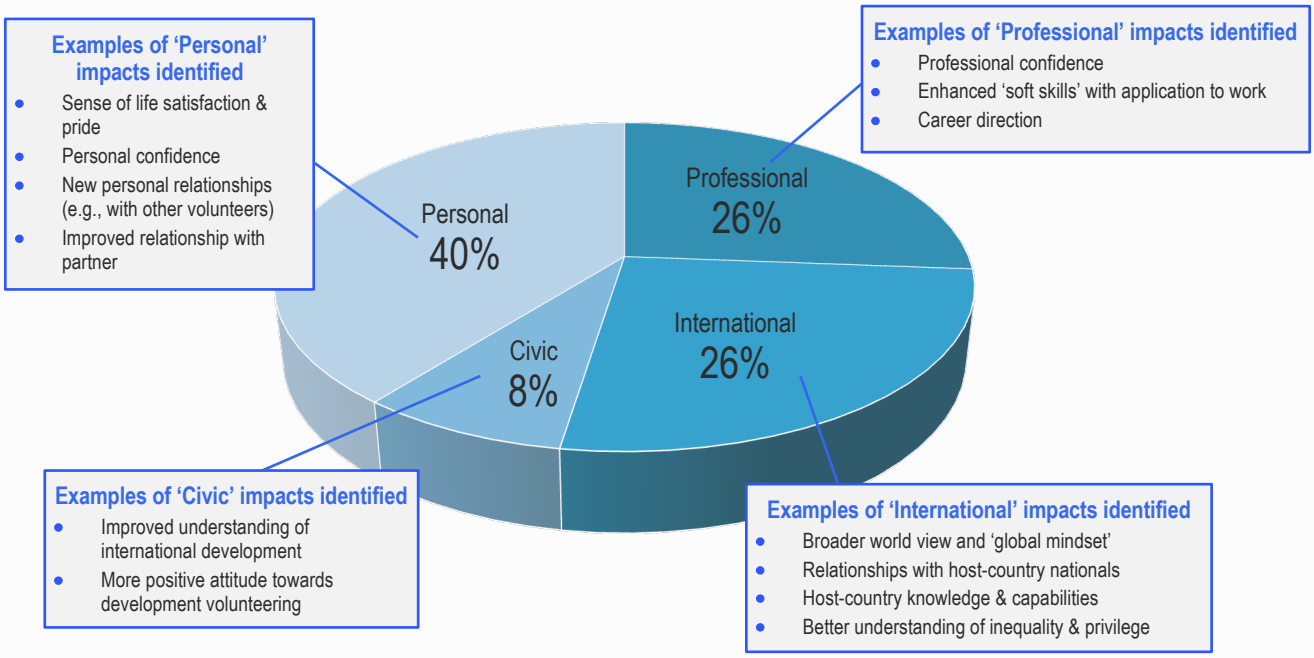
» Structure of Part II of this Report

The remainder of Part II breaks down the impacts on participants for each of the study's four main outcomes of interest:

- Civic participation, engagement and literacy (Section 3)
- Global literacy and connections (Section 4)
- Career progression and professional capabilities (Section 5)
- Personal circumstances and capabilities (Section 6)

Panel 1: Summary of participants' experiences on the program to date (T4)

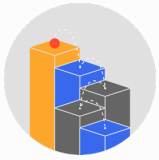
» Proportion of Participants Identifying Each Outcome Area as the Biggest Impact to Date (T4)



» Main Experiences Contributing to Participants' Personal and Professional Changes

Outcome area	Main contributions to change
Civic outcomes (Section 3)	• Observing the assignment's impacts • Experiencing the challenges of achieving development outcomes • Applying skills in a context with different economic conditions and infrastructure
International outcomes (Section 4)	• Being deeply immersed in a culture with different work/living conditions & practices (work & non-work environment) • Forming strong relationships with local colleagues
Professional outcomes (Section 5)	• Undertaking a 'stretch' role involving unfamiliar activities & experiences in a new context • Having opportunities for specific work projects or roles (novelty, challenge) • Observing the impact of one's work in the PO or community • Accessing and observing colleagues and networks from different professional fields
Personal outcomes (Section 6)	• Overcoming challenges of the assignment and living conditions (isolation, differences) • Having opportunities to form strong relationships with volunteers & other diverse groups • Experiencing and observing different lifestyles in the host country

» Participants' Overall Experiences with the Program by Volunteer Type

Group name[1]	Key features of changes and learning outcomes
1. Launchers  **n = 6 (12%)**	**Volunteers in this group are using their volunteer assignment as a stepping-stone to launch a career in a sector or profession that allows them to express their values, typically in the domain of international development (*integrating values into a meaningful career*).** • *Launchers* generally view their experiences with the program as positive with lasting impacts from which some have already benefitted greatly. This is despite some having experiences that differed from their expectations (T4). • *Launchers* had the strongest and clearest career ambitions at T1 and had accrued some of the largest career benefits at both T3 and T4 – including in job applications or interviews, and through the knowledge and capabilities they use in their current work (T4). Their careers also continue to benefit more than other groups from professional networks established during their assignment (T4). *Launchers* was the group most likely to seek a prosocial career transition at T1. The volunteer assignment has helped most, although not all, to achieve this transition (T4). • *Launchers* are more likely than other groups to report the volunteer assignment contributing to their 'domain-specific knowledge and capabilities' (T4), mainly associated with international development practice (T4). Increased professional confidence has been a significant career outcome and has been the biggest overall impact of the assignment for half the *Launchers* (T3 and T4). Different *Launchers* also report career progress and networks as the assignment's biggest impact. They attribute much of their learning to the challenging and new environment and position, opportunities to work on developmental projects, and the PO context (T4), as well as from being able to experience their prior studies 'in practice' (T3). The professional skills they report as most useful in their current work are 'role performance and management capabilities' (T4). • *Launchers* are the least active participants in voluntary service (T4) and have shown the strongest decline in civic participation since T1 (T4). At the same time, those who do undertake voluntary service have shown the largest shift from unskilled to skilled volunteering (T1-T4), suggesting that while the quantity has declined the quality of contribution has likely risen. Most *Launchers* remain open to a future international volunteer assignment (albeit in the distant future for most), and some have already taken up a formal volunteer assignment (T4). These findings support the tentative conclusion (T3) that *Launchers* see their civic participation as closely aligned to their professional/career interests. • *Launchers* have generally sustained higher levels of contact and engagement with their host country than other groups across the three years since their assignments finished (T2-T4).
2. Enhancers  **n = 7 (14%)**	***Enhancers* see their volunteer assignment as a means to consciously develop or enhance a career through the acquisition of skills, experiences, opportunities, and/or networks (*progressing a career through a meaningful and developmental experience*).** • *Enhancers'* overall view their experiences with the program is positive. Most see it as a significant part of their life; three *Enhancers* have experienced career or personal 'turning points' as a direct result of their experiences on the program (T4). As a group, they have experienced perhaps the strongest positive impact on their career/profession to date. • Professionally, *Enhancers* continue to benefit greatly from the knowledge and capabilities they developed during their assignment (T3-T4) and the impact this has had on their professional careers (T3-T4). This includes an increasing number since T3 who have achieved their desired prosocial career transition (T4). • *Enhancers* were more likely than most groups to report improved professional confidence (T4), to report overall career benefits (T4), and to report using in their work (and in job applications and interviews) the knowledge, capabilities and networks that they developed in their time with the program (T4). Besides overall professional confidence, their assignments were most impactful on their 'role performance and management capabilities' and 'domain-specific knowledge and capabilities' (T4). They are also the group that continues to be most engaged with international development issues, exceeding even *Launchers* (T4). • *Enhancers* show higher levels of ongoing engagement with POs and the host country than most groups, mainly through sustaining these while other groups did not (T3-T4). They also show strong levels of continued support for their POs (T4). The sense of meaning arising from what was achieved on specific projects during and after the assignment has been the biggest personal impact of some *Enhancers* (T4). • *Enhancers* retain above average levels of contact with HCNs and use the 'cultural knowledge and capabilities' they developed more than other groups (T4). Two identified improved cultural awareness as the biggest impact of the assignment to date (T4).
3. Career Breakers  **n = 3 (6%)**	**For *Career Breakers*, a volunteer assignment is an interlude to a career that may be returned to after the assignment is completed, but which – at the time of accepting the assignment - is not fulfilling their needs (*taking a temporary and meaningful hiatus from a career*).** • *Career Breakers* have mixed feelings towards their experiences with the program. Overall, it was a positive but difficult time of their lives. They take pride in how they coped and/or what they were able to achieve. Some personal and professional benefits have been accrued and are being applied to their work, civic or personal lives. But for *Career Breakers*, the volunteer assignment has not been a major part of their life. • *Career Breakers'* involvement with the program was the most professionally cautious, having employment to return to if needed after their assignment; a condition that proved valuable to some after their repatriation. Consistent with this, the professional impacts of the volunteer assignment for *Career Breakers* have been valued but small (T4). Their professional development centred mainly on 'cultural knowledge and capabilities' and 'role performance and management capabilities' (T4); these are the outcomes that they use most often in their workplaces (T4), the former in contexts that are not overtly international. That is, *Career Breakers*, like some other groups, have been able to succeed in transferring their improved cross-cultural acumen to domestic work contexts (T4). • *Career Breakers* retain high levels of contact with their PO (T4) although their support has declined since T2. All three reported personal changes as the biggest impact of the assignment to date (T4), stemming from the cultural novelty and challenge presented by their living conditions, and the meaning and inspiration taken from their volunteer experiences. • *Career Breakers'* interests in civic participation appear to have shifted away from the program. They increased their overall pre/post voluntary service more than most groups (T1-T4) yet were less likely than most to express ongoing interest in remote and/or in-country volunteer assignments (T4). They also report declining interest in and engagement with international development issues since their assignment (T4).

PANEL 1: 2/3

4. Transitioners

n = 12 (24%)

***Transitioners* view their volunteer assignment as a pathway to enter a new sector or context, most commonly with an international - rather than domestic – focus (*entering a new sector or context that provides meaning*). At T2 many *Transitioners* reported having affirmed or rejected a potential career avenue, suggesting the assignment may have been utilised to "test" a specific (and quite fixed) career trajectory, rather than "explore" possible career options.**

- Involvement with the program has generally been positive for *Transitioners*. Most are glad for the experience, which has given them lots of stories and fond memories. Several *Transitioners* described their volunteer assignment as a life highlight, although two had generally counterproductive experiences that have tarnished the way they view their time on the program (T4).
- Most *Transitioners* had chosen to leave paid employment to use volunteering as a platform to test a professional transition to a new field or context (T1). Thus, the potential (negative) consequences of a rare but impactful disruption like COVID was relatively high. They experienced challenging repatriations at higher rates than other groups (T2-T3) and their overall experiences with the program are typically less favourable than other groups (T4).
- Professionally, the benefits of the volunteer assignment for *Transitioners'* careers have improved since T3, although these remain more subdued and more delayed than those experienced by comparable group. A key contribution to this is *Transitioners'* strong interest in international work at T1, a goal that was derailed for many by the pandemic (T2-T3). The most valued professional development that their assignment provided stemmed from greater 'cultural knowledge and capabilities' and 'role performance and management capabilities' (T4). The former is also the set of capabilities that they use most regularly in their current work (T4), the bulk of which are domestic despite large numbers of *Transitioners* seeking international careers at T1. Of these, several have now forgone, at least temporarily, their interest in working in international development. Consistent with this, *Transitioners'* engagement with international development issues has declined sharply since T3 (T4).
- *Transitioners* have found that the benefits of their volunteer experiences in job applications and through opportunities created by professional networks established during their assignment have increased substantially since T3 (T4). This group has also seen a sharp rise since T3 in the numbers achieving a prosocial career transition. Four *Transitioners* identified finding their 'career direction' or 'professional identity' as the biggest impact of the assignment to date (T4).
- Perhaps because of the growing success in transitioning to prosocial careers since 2021, the civic participation patterns of *Transitioners* are low (T4) and show a general decline since T1. However, despite *Transitioners'* international career aspirations being curtailed, a shift is apparent in their civic participant towards an international orientation (T1-T4), most notably through *Transitioners* sustaining their ongoing support for POs (T4).

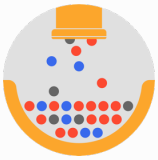
5. Imposed Transitioners

n = 7 (14%)

***Imposed Transitioners* undertake a volunteer assignment in response to a negative career experience (e.g., redundancy) that leads them to consider a new profession or context (*undertaking a meaningful alternative to domestic work with career possibilities*).**

- *Imposed Transitioners* entered the program with less favourable professional/career circumstances than other groups. They now view their experiences with the program as positive and as having a major impact on their lives (T4). These impacts – a mix of professional confidence and direction, personal growth, and deeper cultural appreciation – stem from the challenges and relationships they encountered in the host country, and the opportunities for professional growth presented by the volunteer position, and PO context.
- Most *Imposed Transitioners* have benefitted professionally from their volunteer experience through developing new competencies and improved confidence (T3-T4). Enhanced 'domain-specific knowledge and capabilities' has been a significant and consistent learning outcome for this group (T2-T4). They are also more likely than members of other groups to report this skillset as the one they use most regularly at work (T4). Enhanced 'cultural knowledge and capabilities' - especially culture-general capabilities - has also been consistently reported by this group across recent years (T3-T4). *Imposed Transitioners* have had the highest success at achieving pre-assignment objective to transition to a prosocial career (T4). A relatively large proportion of *Imposed Transitioners* were seeking a prosocial career transition at T1. Most had achieved this by T3 and continue to enjoy this work (T4).
- *Imposed Transitioners'* interest in formal international volunteer assignments has changed in recent years. Many had challenging repatriations and they were less likely than most groups to express an ongoing interest in future volunteer assignments at both T2 and T3. More *Imposed Transitioners* now express interest in undertaking a formal international volunteer assignment in the future (T4). This change likely reflects greater certainty about their career/professional prospects than at earlier interviews, where their interest in paid employment was more prominent (T3).

6. Veterans



n = 10 (20%)

Volunteers in this group are undertaking a volunteer assignment as an opportunity to apply professional expertise accumulated through a long career in order to achieve a positive outcome (*applying career expertise toward a meaningful purpose*).

- *Veterans* are among the most favourable in their views of their experiences with the program. Most – including several repeat volunteers - feel lucky to have had the experience. They hold fond memories and see their assignment as an important part of their life's journey. Nonetheless, the overall impact of the volunteer assignment on *Veterans* has been weaker than most other groups (T4).
- *Veterans* continue to view the major impact of the volunteer assignment as personal (not professional) and the main learning outcome as 'cultural knowledge and capabilities' (T2-T4). This is also the proficiency that *Veterans* see as most useful to their ongoing work (paid and unpaid). Indeed, it is the friendships, sense of meaning or personal satisfaction, and intercultural awareness that make up the 'biggest impacts' reported by this group (T3-T4).
- While much of *Veterans'* prior reported learning was culture-specific (T2-T3), they have undergone the sharpest declines in their engagement with the host-country and contact with HCNs since T3 (T4). Their contact with their POs has also dropped substantially since T2.
- One reason for these changes may be the large uptake by *Veterans* of formal international volunteer assignments – both remote and in-country (T4), the bulk of which are with new POs and in different host countries (T4). *Veterans* are also more enthusiastic than most groups about a future volunteer assignment (T4), although contingencies such as their own health and the characteristics of the volunteer assignment – most notably the proposed duration – remain valid (T3-T4).
- Despite the ongoing involvement of many *Veterans* as development volunteers, *Veterans* are the least engaged in international development issues (T4). They also report declining levels of contact with other volunteers that they met during their assignment (T4).

7. Non-working Partners

n = 5 (10%)

***Non-working Partners* accompany a partner on an international volunteer assignment as an approved accompanying dependant. While they attend VPLJ activities, they undertake no structured work or volunteer role (*experiencing a vicarious assignment and adventure*).**

- *Non-working Partners* have been least strongly affected by their experiences with the program to date. Two have commenced work and both report benefits from their time with the program stemming from their civic participation and/or networks whilst in-country (T4). Their immersion in a new culture for an extended period is the main contributor to this (T2-T4). Nonetheless, their professional development and use of the skills developed during their time in country – primarily 'cultural knowledge and capabilities' – have been relatively minor compared to other groups (T4).
- *Non-working partners* were also more likely to have discontinued nascent lifestyle changes that were instigated by their experiences with the program (T4), and their civic participation is yet to be influenced in substantial ways by their experiences with the program (T4). Interest in formal international volunteer assignments remains low (T4). Collectively, these outcomes suggest a general 'return to normal' for this group.
- *Non-working partners* have lower levels of ongoing interpersonal relationships than most other groups. This includes their connections with HCNs, other volunteers and expatriates (T4). Some *Non-working partners* – and/or their volunteer partners – have reported stronger relationships with their partner as an important (in one case, the primary) outcome of the assignment (T4). For others, it was the exposure to a novel cultural setting that provided the impetus for the biggest impacts, relating to the host culture and improved cultural awareness generally (T4).

[1] Volunteer types are organised by mean age of each group, from youngest (Launchers) to oldest (Veterans). "n" represents the number of participants in each group. Parentheses show the percentage of the full sample per group.

PANEL 1: 3/3

3 Civic Engagement and International Development Literacy

3.1 Overview and Background

The outcomes reported in this section address the program's objective that volunteers and others better appreciate the value of volunteering and the contribution it makes to sustained development.[8] It focuses on two outcomes: "civic engagement" and "international development literacy."

i. **Civic engagement**[9] is conceptualised broadly to include the extent of, nature of, and changes in participants' overall participation in structured and unstructured voluntary service in which they currently engage (i.e., civic participation, Section 3.2), their ongoing contact with and support for POs (Section 3.3), and their involvement with and attitudes toward formal international volunteering positions, remote and in-country (Section 3.4).

ii. **International development literacy** incorporates participants' cognitive engagement in international development issues (e.g., monitoring media, reading or watching topical content, or informing oneself about issues relevant to international development via podcasts, online courses, social media or other sources), and their knowledge of and capabilities relating to the sector (Section 3.5).[10]

The section concludes by distilling the interim findings and considering the emerging implications for the program's volunteer support and management (Section 3.6).

Background: Summary of participants' civic participation, engagement and literacy (T1-T3)

Participants entered the program with high levels of civic engagement and participation. At T1, half had previously participated in some form of short- or long-term international volunteering, and half were active volunteers in Australia either in a community of interest or community of identity. Strong engagement with international development and civic issues formed important parts of many participants' identity.

Participants' overall civic participation declined from T1 to T3, although the direct impacts of COVID on this decline were strong. Some evidence at T3 indicated that involvement in the program may have influenced the nature of participants' voluntary service, as reflected by greater focus on: (i) international (rather than domestic) issues, (ii) skills-based volunteering, and (iii) voluntary service aligned to new or evolving values and beliefs that were shaped during their volunteer assignments and through the VPLJ.

For most volunteers, contact with and ongoing support for their POs since the end of their assignment had declined at T3. Interest in future international development volunteering assignments was strong, with just seven volunteers (14%) reporting not being open to either a remote or in-country assignment. Participants views about the benefits and efficacy of remote volunteering and in-country volunteering differed greatly, based on the mode's suitability for their profession/role and/or their personal circumstances.

At T3, participants exhibited higher levels of international development literacy and had better (and more nuanced) awareness of the contributions of international development volunteering to international development and public diplomacy. This includes participants who had completed prior formal studies in international development and/or prior international volunteer assignments.

These changes, which continued to evolve after their assignments, were influenced by participants' contact with the program's formal support activities (e.g., VPLJ and Alumni network), their in-country experiences, and their contacts with volunteers and others during and after their assignments.

3.2 Overall Civic Participation (voluntary service)

Thirty-eight participants were involved in some form of voluntary service at T4 (76%). Twenty-five of these (66%) were volunteering in "skills-based" roles or contexts that drew on their professional knowledge and/or skills. For a similar number (24 participants, 63% of those who reported some voluntary service),[11] the nature of this volunteering was directly affected by their involvement in the program – through interests generated, skills gained, or relationships formed. This includes 14 participants completing formal international development volunteering assignments (Section 3.4).

Several participants reported actively seeking out local volunteering roles enabling them to use cross-cultural skills that were developed during their assignment.[12] Participant #04, for example, whose biggest impact during the assignment was "*an epistemological thing around [culturally different] ways of knowing… to be reflective as an Anglo Australian in that space"* (T4), now commits a full day per week to organising and facilitating anti-racism support programs in the local community. These include conducting training and workshops for 60-70 people (in 2023), presenting at conferences, and winning multiple (small) government grants.

Other participants have found opportunities that built on professional and/or civic interests that were instigated or developed during their assignment, such as social enterprises (#09), gender equality (#14), environmental issues (#46) and/or issues specific to their former host-country (#01, #02, #45, #54).[13]

Four participants had applied for and accepted voluntary positions on boards or executive committees for NGOs or INGOs. Three of these organisations have explicit international humanitarian/development foci.[14] Two other volunteers were seeking NGO board positions when interviewed. Just one of the six had interest or experience in this type of role prior to their assignment. In most cases, these participants' contributions relate to both their professional interests and their volunteer experiences. For example, participant #09 gained a passion for and understanding of social enterprises through her PO, which was the first social enterprise with which she had any involvement. She is now a sector leader in Australia, a national council member for the sector and:

> *I sit on a few Boards of some not-for-profits that run social enterprises … they ask me [to join the Board] because they need [someone with] a specific skill in social enterprise that also has experience sitting on Boards and can help with some of the governance stuff*

Twelve participants – nine volunteers and three *Non-working partners* – were performing no formal voluntary service at T4.[15] Seven of the nine volunteers were *Launchers* (3) or *Transitioners* (4), and four were working in paid roles at T4 which they associated with strong pro-social features[16] – "*I do some community work through work itself. I occasionally go and do working bees and stuff like that down at the community garden. But other than that, not a whole lot … I'm really time poor*" (#35).

Two volunteers reported employee-related restrictions on their ability to volunteer (e.g., sanctions for security reasons). Demands of work or study, personal or health issues, or relocating to a new city were the main reasons given for participants' non-involvement in voluntary service.[17]

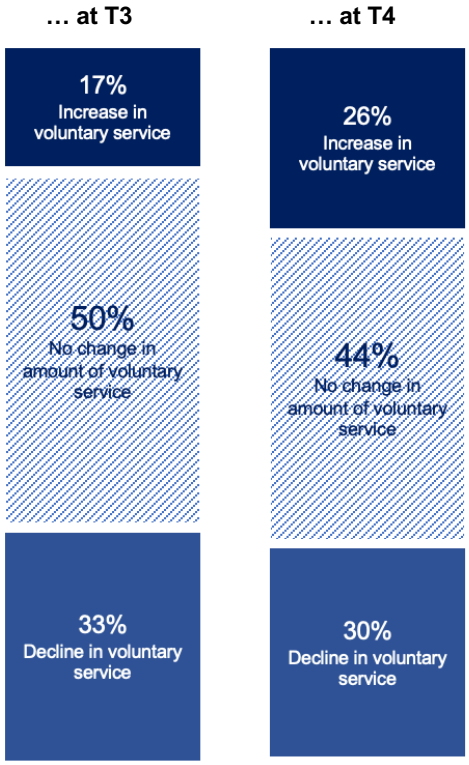
» Changes in Intensity of Civic Participation (T1-T4)

Figure 3 summarises changes in the intensity of participants' voluntary service between T1 and T3 (nearest bar) and T4 (far right). It shows that 13 participants (26%)[18] have shown a general increase in the intensity of their civic participation since before their assignment (T1-T4). This is a larger proportion than at T2 and T3, when COVID restrictions limited opportunities for most forms of local and international volunteering. The number of participants whose civic participation has declined across the study to date (T1-T4) has fallen slightly since T3, from 33% (T3) to 30% (T4).[19]

All ten *Veterans* were involved in some form of voluntary service, four through formal international assignments.

Launchers, in contrast, were the least active group at T4 (3/6) and exhibited the strongest decline from T1 to T4. As the interview extract in the box below suggests, one reason for this is their changing circumstances from university (T1), where "*more opportunities [to volunteer are] put in front of you*" (#37) to (new) full-time work at T4. Four *Launchers* also relocated to new cities, a post-assignment experience that was both common and associated with lower levels of voluntary service ("*I haven't really, to be honest, sewed my oats at all in [new home city], despite now being here for nearly 3 months because I'm just assuming I'll leave soon*", #37).

Figure 3: Change in intensity of voluntary service since T1



"When I was at uni I was a lot more into volunteering & being part of groups. And then I quit it all [to accept the assignment] & I think you just come back & it's one of those things that once you stop, getting back into it is the hardest part. When you're involved in things, I think you're more likely to stay & get involved in other things, but when I said goodbye to it all, lived overseas, come back & you're starting again. I reckon it's hard getting back into it …. Then I got this full-time job & now I'm kind of at the other end where … I'm working more than I have ever & just a change of personal circumstances, living on my own" (#11, *Launcher*)

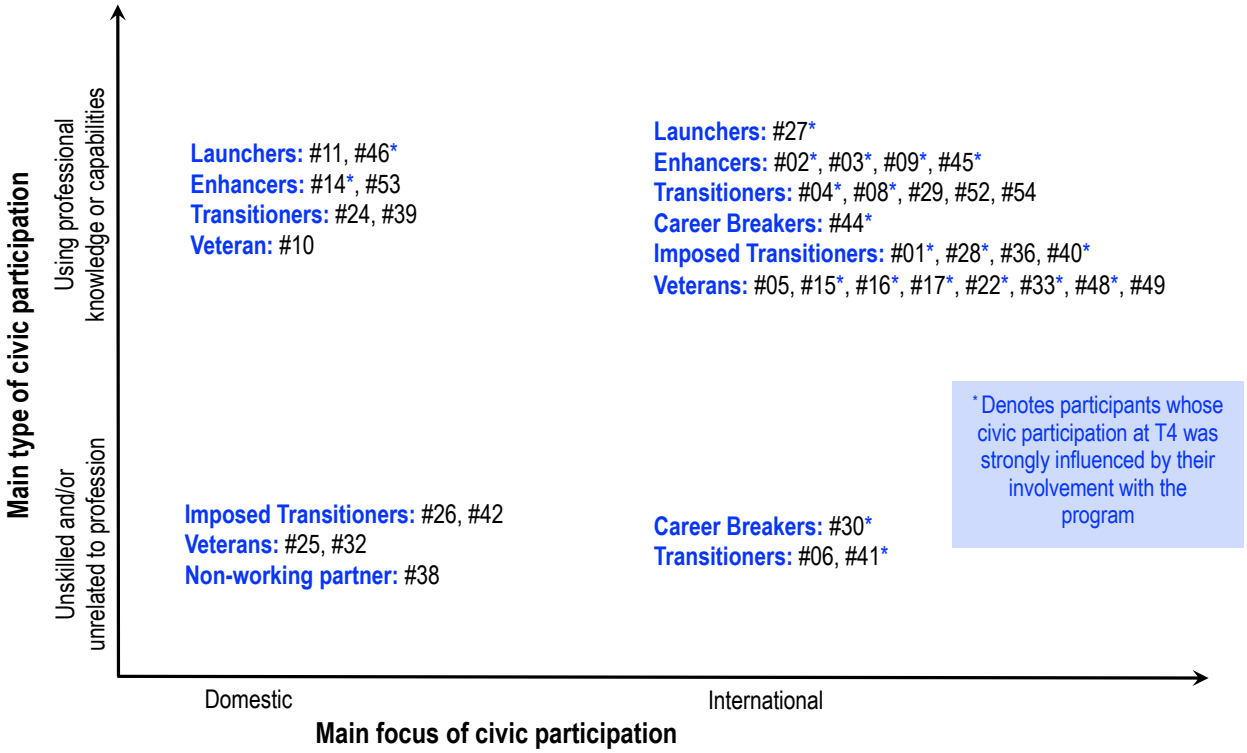
» The Nature of Civic Participation (T4)

Participants' voluntary service is noticeably more skills-based and internationally-focused than it was at T1. To illustrate this, **Figure 4** shows participants who reported some form of voluntary service at T4. These are 'mapped' according to: (i) the main type of civic contribution (whether some or all of their voluntary service utilises their professional knowledge or capabilities, or whether it is unskilled and/or unrelated to their profession), shown on the vertical axis, and (ii) the main focus of the civic contribution (whether some or all of their voluntary service focuses on international issues or beneficiaries, including CALD beneficiaries in domestic settings, or whether it focuses mainly on domestic issues or beneficiaries) – on the horizontal axis. Participants are shown by volunteer type. An asterisk indicates participants whose voluntary service at T4 has been strongly influenced by their involvement with the program.

As **Figure 4** shows, most of the sample's current voluntary service draws on their professional knowledge or capabilities and is international in focus. The civic participation activities of 21 participants (42% of the sample, 55% of those involved in voluntary service at T4) are directly influenced by their assignment experiences.

The civic participation of *Launchers* has shown the strongest shift from relatively unskilled volunteering (T1) to skills-based volunteering (T4), while *Imposed Transitioners* and *Transitioners* are the groups whose volunteering has shifted most noticeably from domestic to international in focus (T1-T4).

Figure 4: Nature of civic participation at T4 (type of contribution x focus of contribution)



3.3 Ongoing Contact with and Support for POs

3.3.1 Ongoing Contact with POs

Thirty-three volunteers (73%[20]) maintain some form of contact with one or more members of their PO (T4). This includes 16 volunteers across all categories who had indicated, in at least one earlier interview, that they did not intend to sustain this contact. It also includes three volunteers who reported having 'lost' contact with their POs at T3 but who have since reconnected.

The depth and frequency of most volunteer-PO contact has continued to decline in the two years since T3. With a few notable exceptions (see the case study of 'Serena' in Section 3.3.2), most ongoing contact is limited to infrequent personal (rather than work-related) exchanges via social media and email.

» Patterns of Contact with POs by Volunteer Type and Characteristics

In general, volunteers who have sustained stronger contact with POs (regularity and intensity of exchanges) since their assignment finished in 2020 are:

- *Career Breakers* (3/3) or *Enhancers* (6/7) and not *Launchers* (4/6), although the frequency and intensity of contact varies greatly in all groups.[21]
- Those who were unaccompanied during their assignment (27/33, 82%) rather than those accompanied by a partner (7/12, 59%).
- Those whose assignments were briefer and finished before COVID. As **Table 3** shows, contact with POs for this "non-repatriated" group exceeds 80% from T2-T4. Contact between repatriated volunteers and POs, in contrast, has declined substantially in the past two years.

Table 3: Participants' ongoing contact with partner organisations

PO contact	T2 (2020), n = 49	T3 (2021), n = 49	T4 (2023), n = 45
All participants	81%	86%	76%
Non-repatriated participants (n = 13)	81%	81%	85%
Repatriated participants (n = 32)	82%	91%	67%

Table excludes Non-working partners

Despite T3 analysis suggesting an emerging pattern, at T4 no significant differences existed between volunteers based on the location of their PO (capital city vs other)[22] or type of PO ('local' PO vs international).[23]

Participants identified several features contributing to reduced contact intensity and frequency with POs in the period since T2. These include volunteers' decision to disconnect from social media (#04, #12, #30, #43), deaths or turnover of key PO personnel[24] (#07, #29), the tenuous political situation in the host country, and negative emotional responses elicited by the contact, typically due to conditions in the host country or PO (e.g., feeling distress due to circumstances in host countries - #14, #25). In addition, several volunteers suggested that Internet and mobile data expenses in the host country may have contributed to a decline in PO staff initiating (more) contact.

The groups experiencing the sharpest decline in contact with POs since T2 have been *Veterans* – six of whom have accepted subsequent formal international volunteering roles (remote or in-country) with different POs - and *Launchers*, all of whom have commenced full-time employment since completing their assignments; four of these are in overtly pro-social roles or organisations.

3.3.2 Ongoing Support for POs

Support for POs takes two forms: (i) *formal* support via a structured volunteer assignment with a pre-defined position description and overseen by the program, and (ii) *informal* support, in which the volunteer continues to contribute to POs' capacity via regular or ad-hoc voluntary assistance.

Although the proportion of volunteers maintaining contact with POs declined slightly from T3 to T4, the proportion providing formal or informal support to POs rose in the same period from 24% to 40%.

The three columns in **Figure 5** on the following page show the percentage of volunteers at each phase (T2-T4) having no contact with POs, some contact with POs without providing support, and those who are continuing to provide support for POs. The latter group is disaggregated to show volunteers providing *formal* PO support via a structured volunteer assignment (top section of each column) and those providing *informal* support through direct contact between POs and the volunteer (second section of each column).

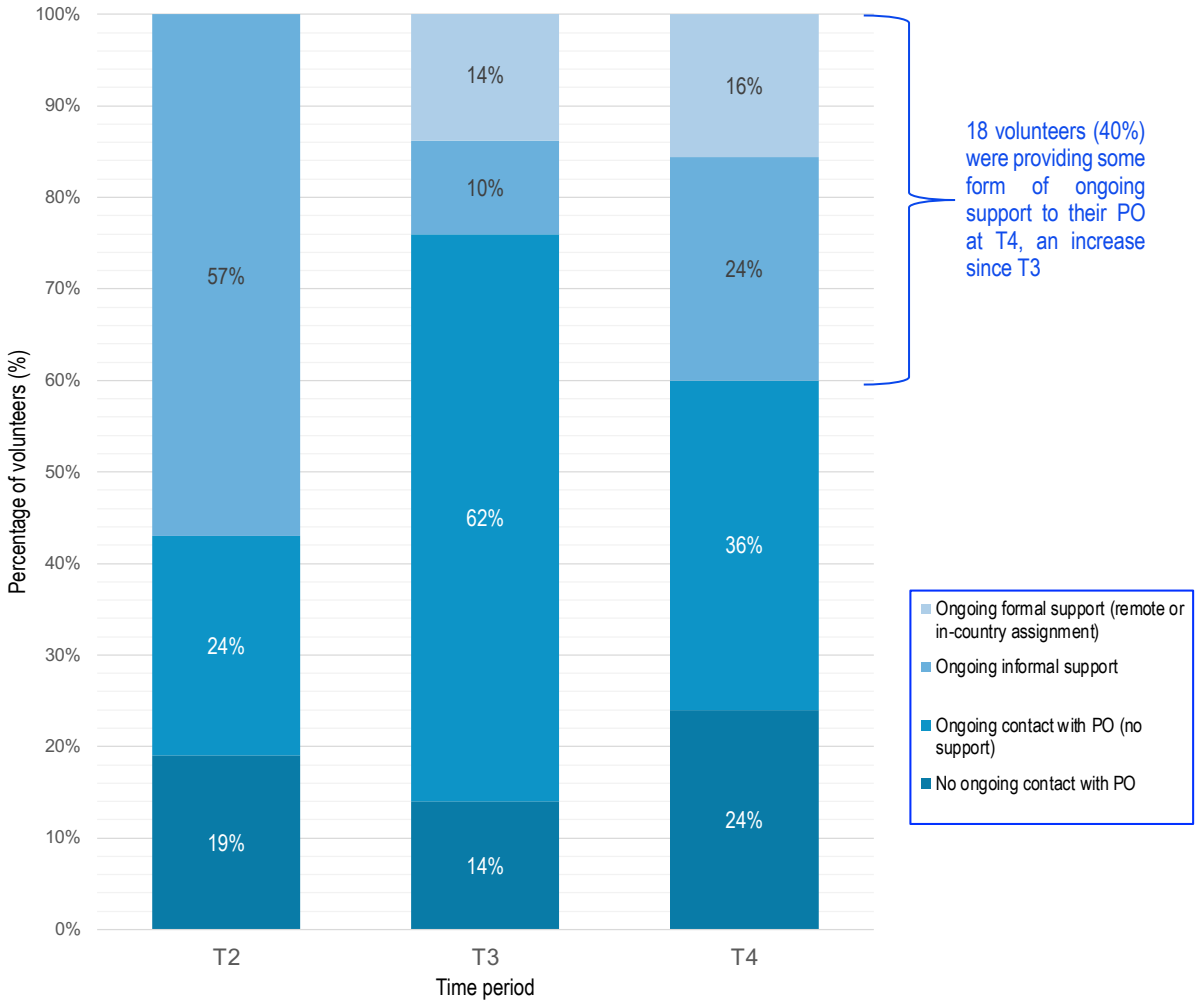
As **Figure 5** shows, 18 volunteers (18/45, 40%) were continuing to support their POs at T4 - seven (16%) via formal assignments.[25] Not evident in **Figure 5**, an additional four volunteers reported undertaking, but subsequently discontinuing, some form of PO support between T3 and T4.

» Patterns of Support for POs by Volunteer Type and Characteristics

Four characteristics are most strongly associated with volunteers who have continued to support their POs since their assignment finished in 2020:

- Being *Enhancers* or *Imposed Transitioners*.[26]
- Being unaccompanied by a partner during their assignment.[27]
- Being repatriated from their assignment before its completion due to COVID. These volunteers are more likely to be completing a formal volunteer assignment than those who were not repatriated.[28]
- Undertaking assignments with government agencies or internationally-focused POs (i.e., INGOs or intergovernmental agencies, 43%) rather than domestic NGOs.[29]

Figure 5: Volunteers' ongoing contact with and support for partner organisations



» The Nature of PO Support

Although the overall proportion of volunteers supporting POs has grown since T3, the intensity of this support is low and, on the whole, ad-hoc (e.g., responses to periodic inquiries from POs). Nonetheless, most POs that reach out to former volunteers for support appear to be receiving assistance they request. With just a few exceptions, requests for assistance from POs are generally followed up. Some volunteers have made offers to help since T3 that have not been taken up by POs.

Great variety exists in the type and extent of ongoing *informal* support that volunteers provided POs. The most common, reported by eight volunteers, were tasks associated with an ongoing project that the volunteer had instigated or been a part of (e.g., #03, #20, #33) that ranged from "*very basic*" help to finish a project that had continued since the volunteers' assignment, to elaborate mentoring involving several hours per week across extended periods.

Other common informal support activities were managing or establishing PO websites (#09, #45, #49) and help preparing written grant or funding applications (#09, #22, #26, #52). As the **case study of Serena** illustrates, PO support was often anchored by a strong relationship with a former counterpart or PO colleague.

In addition to those indicated in **Figure 5**, a few volunteers have assisted particular PO staff (including former counterparts) on individual tasks like preparing professional résumés (#33) or applying for further study opportunities (#01, #22, #53).

Volunteer stories: Serena - Helping a former counterpart through technological change

Serena had had a 20-year professional career when she entered the program. Her initial motivation for volunteering was, in part, "*to challenge myself … I need a change; this will help me re-evaluate what I'm good at*" (T1) & to gain confidence & experiences at a time in her career when she was "*slightly stagnating*" (T1).

Serena's assignment was brief & she attributed no major changes to it, although coping in a challenging environment "*boosted my confidence*" & she developed – & enjoyed using – different approaches to mentoring & helping her PO colleagues (T2).

Before her assignment, Serena's civic participation was "*less than other people I know*" (T1). What she did was mainly for social reasons & was unrelated to her professional training.

The volunteer assignment, although brief, gave Serena experiences & confidence that encouraged her to apply for – & helped her be selected to – a voluntary international (Asia-Pacific) committee of professionals. Among the activities she contributed to on this committee were creating online training videos & organising a professional conference, including arranging for a PO employee to attend remotely during COVID (T3). Through her involvement on this committee, Serena believes she boosted both her "*profile*" & confidence (T3).

Serena has also continued to support the PO since her return to Australia. Part of this has been "*Zoom session set up for about an hour on Tuesdays*" that have continued across three years, although "*it comes & goes in how regularly it happens … about once a week to once a month*" (T4). Joining these Zoom sessions with the PO is Serena's professional colleague who works in a different Australian capital city. Jointly, Serena & her colleague share advice & experiences with the PO, mainly on the use of advanced medical equipment. They also sometimes provide "*teaching sessions for the more junior staff*" (T4). As Serena explains (T4):

> *We've been working together … on Zoom, just to catch up, see what's going on. We've given them some talks, we looked at what (equipment) they've got. They are in the middle of getting some more equipment so were needing our help a lot to get it all thought about … My [Australian colleague] has got slightly different equipment … it's useful to say, well, I would do it this way & he would do it this way. In [the host country] we've got to come up with a solution that works with what you've got. We share ideas & we can bounce between us – there's a spectrum & there's almost a debate (about the best solutions to problems)*

Serena also continues to respond to ad-hoc inquiries from the PO (T4):

> *As well as the Zoom chats, we have occasional Facebook messenger chats to try & solve a problem with this piece of equipment or that … some of the (PO staff) who are working in the department were sending me text messages, 'Oh I've got this problem at work. Can you help with this?' It's quite interesting trying to debug software over Facebook messenger, but we can do some stuff*

Most of Serena's ongoing contact with the PO is anchored by her close friendship with her former counterpart, the PO manager. If the counterpart were to leave the PO, Serena says "*I don't know if I'd continue*" the support (T4).

Serena is open to & has considered a formal volunteer assignment elsewhere; however, there are few opportunities for her specific expertise & she "*quite enjoys*" (T4) the informality of her work with the PO ("*we don't have to do it, if it's not convenient for them, that's fine … I'm trying to reduce my hours at work a bit & have Tuesday afternoons off, so I am usually free-ish about 4 o'clock*", T4).

» Reasons for Discontinuing PO Support

Most volunteers who had discontinued their support for POs did so for pragmatic reasons – being "*time poor*" (#35) competing personal or professional commitments, health reasons (#14, #23, #49), or other voluntary commitments (including formal volunteer assignments with different POs).

For other volunteers, it related to acrimony with their PO (#11, #41), PO employee turnover (#07), or feeling disconnected from the POs' operating context and so unable to provide valuable support (#24). Others reported feeling discomfort due to the POs' operating circumstances (#25) or the host country's political situation (#42).

Several volunteers who no longer support the PO attribute this to POs not needing their support (e.g., #19, #31, #46). In some of these cases, the PO has begun hosting a subsequent volunteer.

Just a few volunteers reported being unable to assist POs who had requested support *("I had really bad depression when I came back … I just wasn't really up for supporting that relationship. It would've been nice to have stayed in contact but now I almost feel guilty for having ghosted them for so long*", #14).

3.4 Formal International Volunteering

3.4.1 Remote International Volunteer Assignments

Eight volunteers (18% of volunteers, 16% of participants) had completed at least one formal remote volunteer assignment since T3. Half of these (4) were *Veterans*, two of whom had completed multiple remote assignments since T3.[30] One volunteer completed a hybrid assignment involving a remote assignment and subsequent in-country placement with the same PO (#40).

All eight who had completed a remote assignment in this period had expressed an openness to future volunteer assignments previously (T2 and T3). Six of the eight had applied for or completed a remote assignment prior to T3 (2021). The remaining two indicated at T3 that, at that time, they lacked time (#06) or interest (#33) to undertake a remote assignment.

Of the other volunteers who have now discontinued a former remote assignment (T3), none are involved formally in the program, yet most are open to future assignments (T4). Some reported looking for volunteer opportunities in recent months while others were prevented from volunteering at this stage of their life due to work (#09, #19, #27) or family commitments (#36, #53).

Experiences with remote assignments were perceived as less rewarding, more challenging and less effective than in-country assignments. Several who had completed one remote assignment expressed reluctance to do so again. Suggestions to improve the remote volunteer experience, provided by those who had completed one or more remote assignment, are **in the box on the right**.

Participants' suggestions to improve the experiences of remote assignments

1. Consider ways to help volunteers overcome the absence of contextual knowledge, relationships with PO staff & feedback that are available during in-country assignments
2. Consider ways to better align the 'remote' mode with the program's core philosophy, which tends to emphasise contextual awareness & peer solidarity that are difficult to achieve remotely
3. Support volunteers & PO staff to improve their digital literacies & so improve efficacy & enjoyment
4. Take extra effort to ensure roles & expectations are clear within the PO
5. Set up multiple points of contact in the PO (i.e., avoid relying on a single person)
6. Streamline the approval process (e.g., police checks) to make it easier for former volunteers to apply or accept assignments

3.4.2 In-country International Volunteer Assignments

The current study period (2021-23) was the first since COVID halted the program's in-country assignments in 2020 that participants could volunteer abroad.

Seven participants (16% of volunteers, 14% of participants) had completed - or were completing at the time of the interview - at least one formal in-country volunteering assignment since T3. Three of these were in the same host country and with the same PO.[31] Four of the seven had indicated at T3 that they would not, or would be unlikely to, complete another volunteer assignment, reflecting a change of attitude towards volunteering in the past two years. None had completed a remote international volunteer assignment, although one undertook a hybrid (remote + in-country) assignment with the same PO.

The seven volunteers came from three groups - *Veterans* (3/10), *Launchers* (2/5), and *Imposed Transitioners* (2/7) - and their motivations varied. Two (#27, #28) returned to the host country for mainly personal reasons: relationships instigated during their initial assignment. Participant #40's assignment was hybrid ("*remote followed by in-country, 9 months + 9 months*") and is "*filling the time*" until another international role, delayed due to the pandemic, becomes available. Two married *Veterans* (#15, #16) who reported at T3 being "*highly unlikely*" (#16, T3) to volunteer again, felt, according to one:

> *… a sense of unfinished business … [the previous assignment was] enormously frustrating … some of those relationships were really evolving and potentially fruitful and so to have that chopped [short due to the repatriation] was like, oh damn … this seemed like a chance to finish the story* (#15)

3.4.3 Interest in Future International Volunteer Assignments

The proportion of participants expressing an interest in undertaking a future international volunteer assignment – either in-country or remote - has risen across the three post-assignment interviews from 38% at T2, to 69% at T3, to 70% at T4. Just five participants (10%) were categorically against a future assignment, for reasons of personal health, other priorities, or not perceiving value in doing so.

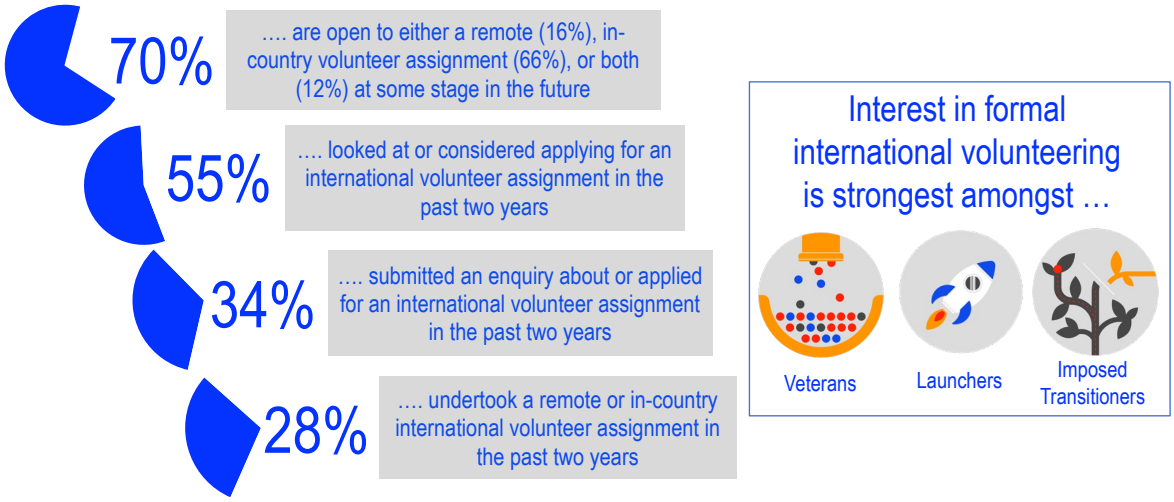
As **Figure 6** shows, sizeable proportions of participants expressed or enacted interest in formal international volunteering at T4 though:

- being open to either a remote or in-country volunteer assignment (or both) at some stage in the future;

- having looked at or considered applying for a volunteer assignment with the program or with a different development volunteer program in the past two years (e.g., searched the program's website for suitable roles, considered applying for a volunteer role they saw advertised); or
- going further than this by submitting an enquiry or applying for a position. Of these, 14 participants (28%) had found and commenced (and in some cases completed multiple) volunteer assignments since T3 – seven in-country and eight remote (one completed a hybrid assignment).

As **Figure 6** shows, interest in future international volunteer assignments was strongest among *Launchers*, *Imposed Transitioners* and *Veterans*. *Veterans* (5/10 – three in-country and two remote) and *Launchers* (3/6 – two in-country, one remote) were the groups with the largest representation of assignment uptake. Stronger interest was also apparent for volunteers whose assignments were with domestic NGOs[32] and for volunteers who were accompanied by a partner during their assignment.[33]

Figure 6: Participation and interest in formal international volunteering (T4)



Several participants qualified their interest in future assignments by **time** ("*not at this stage of my career", #07; "in a few decades time would probably be the most ideal*", #45), **personal circumstances** ("*I'm a little more circumspect about taking off into wild and difficult places than perhaps I was three years ago*", #22) or **assignment conditions** ("*If someone said would you like to come to Samoa for a month, and help us do something or other, I would go in flash. I don't think I'd go for two years*", #05). Others focused on the **volunteer role** itself as a determinant of future assignments ("*It'd have to be the right role … right job, right destination, right time … probably a bit more strategic for Australia's interest and for [the region's] nations", #01).*

Table 4 summarises the main reasons given by participants for their reservations about in-country assignments (left column) and remote assignments (right column). For others, interest in future international volunteer assignments is curtailed by family commitments (#36, #53), study (#20), challenges associated with age/health (#15, #16, #18, #48), and difficulties finding roles to suit their expertise (#06, #44).

Table 4: Future volunteer assignments - Main reasons for not considering (by assignment type)

In-country assignments	Remote assignments
Career or finances (negative financial implications, seeking a paid role)	Online medium is inappropriate (not suit my profession, ineffective, lack of digital infrastructure in host country)
Timing not right (stage of life)	Online medium is not enjoyable (limited interpersonal contact & no in-country experiences)
Assignment features (too long, circumstances too challenging)	Financial incentives (poorly remunerated)
Concern about assignment's suitability & contribution to PO (e.g., type of role, PO readiness, strategic nature of the contribution)	

3.5 International Development Literacy

One of the strongest changes identified at both T2[34] and T3[35] was to participants' engagement with, views on, and understanding of, the values, practices, assumptions and relationships that exist within the international aid and development sector ("international development literacy").

Participants' engagement with international development issues and the sector, including their attitudes towards international development volunteering and the program generally, is in Section 3.5.1. Section 3.5.2 addresses participants' understanding of international development values, practices, assumptions and relationships. Section 3.5.3 identifies ways that participants have applied their international development literacy in the period 2021-23.

3.5.1 Engagement with International Development Issues and Sector

Participants' levels of cognitive engagement with international development issues, while strong, had weakened since T3. Nine reported (and were conscious of) noticeable declines in their level of interest and engagement, whilst five of these reported no engagement at all over the past two years.[36] The main reasons for this were a general disengagement from world events following COVID (e.g., "*more insular*", #46) or issues being "*off my radar*" (#30) due to work, family or other commitments.

Participants' **cognitive engagement** with international development issues is measured by their monitoring and engaging with news, media reports, social media and/or policy announcements relating to international development policy or practice.

Noticeable declines in engagement were evident in *Transitioners* and *Career Breakers* whose professional aspirations had returned to areas unrelated to international development. A small number wanted to engage more regularly but found it difficult. As one explained:

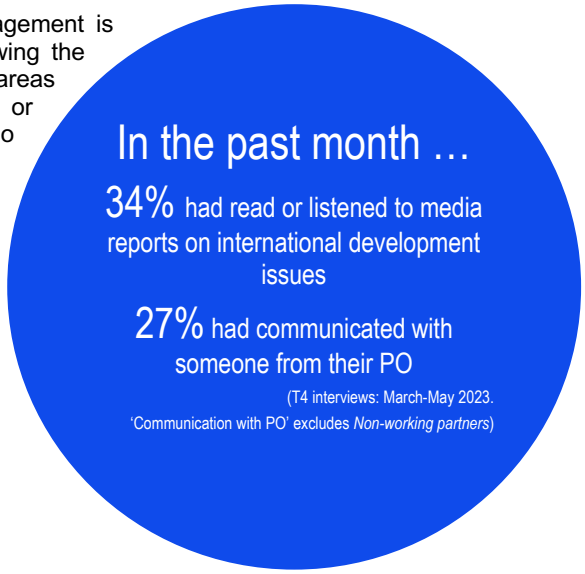
> *I try and be engaged … compared to many of my colleagues I seem to know more about what's going on, but in an actual practical way, not so much … I guess I don't really know how to. I'm still following [on social media] my colleagues – the other volunteers from [the host country], who do all sorts of things. But what I did was quite specialised, I don't really feel I understand enough still about how that interacts with departmental funding or anything like that (#44)*

Despite these declines, two thirds remain enthusiastically or moderately engaged in issues and events in international development. This includes those proactively monitoring social media (#32, #35, #44), news media (#39), podcasts (#35), and mail lists (#17). Others keep up-to-date through regular discussions with friends or former and current volunteers who share interests in the sector.[37] Several have begun engaging with specific aspects of development that are relevant to their work, like social enterprises (#09, #46), development and public health (#02, #27, #45), specific programs in which they have been involved (#54), and/or development issues in specific nations or regions (#01, #02, #05, #08, #19, #28).

An example of this is the **case study of Vivienne**, on the following page, whose experiences with the program have seeded an interest in international development and, through this, deeper understanding of the broader implications of aid and development.

Enhancers are the group that remains most strongly engaged with international development issues at T4; *Veterans* are the least.[38]

Unsurprisingly, the strongest predictor of ongoing engagement is employment in the sector. The seven participants showing the strongest cognitive engagement all now work in different areas of international development, either in paid roles or international volunteer assignments.[39] Three others who continue strong engagement but do not currently work in the sector expressed interest in working in the sector in the near future.[40] A related decline in international development engagement is also apparent in some participants whose career focus has shifted from international to domestic, most notable among *Transitioners*.



Volunteer stories: Vivienne - Staying engaged & seeing a bigger picture

Vivienne's interest in volunteering was sparked during a visit in 2016 to a friend volunteering overseas. She described feeling "*… so jealous … what an amazing opportunity … I thought I had the skills & I love travelling, and I guess my field … lends itself to this type of opportunity* (T1). She soon "*signed up for the [program's] monthly emails & checked the [program's] website every month or so for about three years*" (T1). She tried "*a couple of short-term [unskilled] volunteer things, the sort of thing they now say is bad*" (T1). It was only an unexpected redundancy in 2019 that made her realise "*all of a sudden I had the opportunity to take [a volunteer assignment] that came up … it really matched my passion for new cultures & travelling & seeing new places & actually being a part of something that I could be proud of … contribute something meaningful*" (T1).

Vivienne's assignment was "*the most challenging, frustrating, rewarding, positive, frightening experience of my life … some of the highest highs, some of the lowest lows. Professionally the best experience I've ever had for sure"* (T2). The assignment was directly responsible for reigniting her passion for her chosen profession & for her next career step.

The assignment also had a significant impact on Vivienne's view of aid & development. Before her assignment, Vivienne had little knowledge of, interest in, or involvement with international development or Australia's aid program. She explained (T1):

> *I'm not naturally involved in the day-to-day issues, I don't watch the news, for example. Many of my friends are quite political & are quite vocal about things, so I love those conversations, but they also scare me a bit*

It was during her assignment that Vivienne (T2):

> *… became a bit more politically aware, a bit more interested as well … I've gained a better understanding of [Australia's] role in the Pacific & why maybe we have a role there. And it being not so much just about aid but being about positioning & all that stuff. You know, in politics nothing's ever purely just to help someone, right? I think I've lost a bit of naïveté about that*

Since returning, Vivienne's interest & understanding has grown further. At T3, she reported that she was:

> *… definitely taking more notice & just trying to understand the thinking behind things … so often political decisions are socialised as 'It's good for us to do this, we're helping people' but there's always an agenda & I really saw that in [the host country]. Politically, this protects us because we have an influence here. We put our money in there so [the host country] feels kind of bonded to us … so you go, 'Yeah, this makes more sense … it's like building your alliances' (T3)*

By T4, Vivienne has become, she says, "*much more aware".* She now listens regularly *"to a lot more global podcasts & political podcasts & track(s) situations that are happening in countries that I have been familiar with, including [the host country] … it's reignited interest in previous places that I've gone also*" She reflected that:

> *You know, I don't think I had much knowledge or understanding of what the aid program was before. Definitely, having been a part of it I now think about how aid works in conjunction or as a part of that political structure. Like how having aid going into [the host country] feeds into political goals in the Pacific area. So that has helped me understand that bigger picture side of things & I definitely did not have that before at all* (T4)

In explaining these changes, Vivienne felt several features of her assignment were pertinent. One was:

> *taking yourself out of your own context … I was exposed more to the influence that Australia has & [other countries] have … it just put things into place on a broader stage. Australian politics never really interested me, funnily enough, because it doesn't impact my life … but when you had that experience externally, you're seeing how those small decisions … can actually affect people in other countries. That opened my eyes* (T3)

She also remembered conversations during her assignment:

> *… with people I met because I had come in through an aid program … a conversation with [a European energy expert]. We had this long conversation around why would a […] company invest their time & money in [the host country]? Then conversations with other volunteers, for example, one who was working in the agricultural space & again the question was what's the value to Australia around investing in [the host country's] agricultural sector & supporting [it] to become more independent & sustainable? So there is less dependence on counties who aren't Australia. So less [foreign] influence. From there just coming back when I hear things on the news or on podcasts … it makes so much more sense now* (T4)

Vivienne associates this understanding of the geopolitical consequences of development with a better appreciation for the larger impact of her volunteer assignment that arose, in part, from opportunities for contact with the High Commission. As she explained at the time (T2):

> *When you go in as a volunteer, you think it's a very important role, but then you also think it's a small role & it doesn't really make an impact. But we actually got the opportunity to meet with some people from the Australian High Commission & … see where we sat in the context of [the sector in the host country] because even though what we were doing was actually quite small … to have an understanding of where you fit, it helped me to see that, yes, it was a small project, but the impact can be quite big. I remember hearing someone say that you don't really know what your impact is as a volunteer until 3-4 years after - you might never see. But we're lucky in that we can see that there is scope for this to grow, even if we're not there. So I think now having been a volunteer I can see that reality. You might do a little thing, but actually the impact can be very, very great, because it ripples out*

Work & family demands & health challenges mean that Vivienne was not strongly engaged in civic or political activity in Australia at the time of the interview. Nonetheless, she credits her assignment to her "*now understand[ing] why Australia is going to do this activity … that was pretty eye opening, that more strategic view*" (T4).

» Attitudes Towards International Development Volunteering and the Program

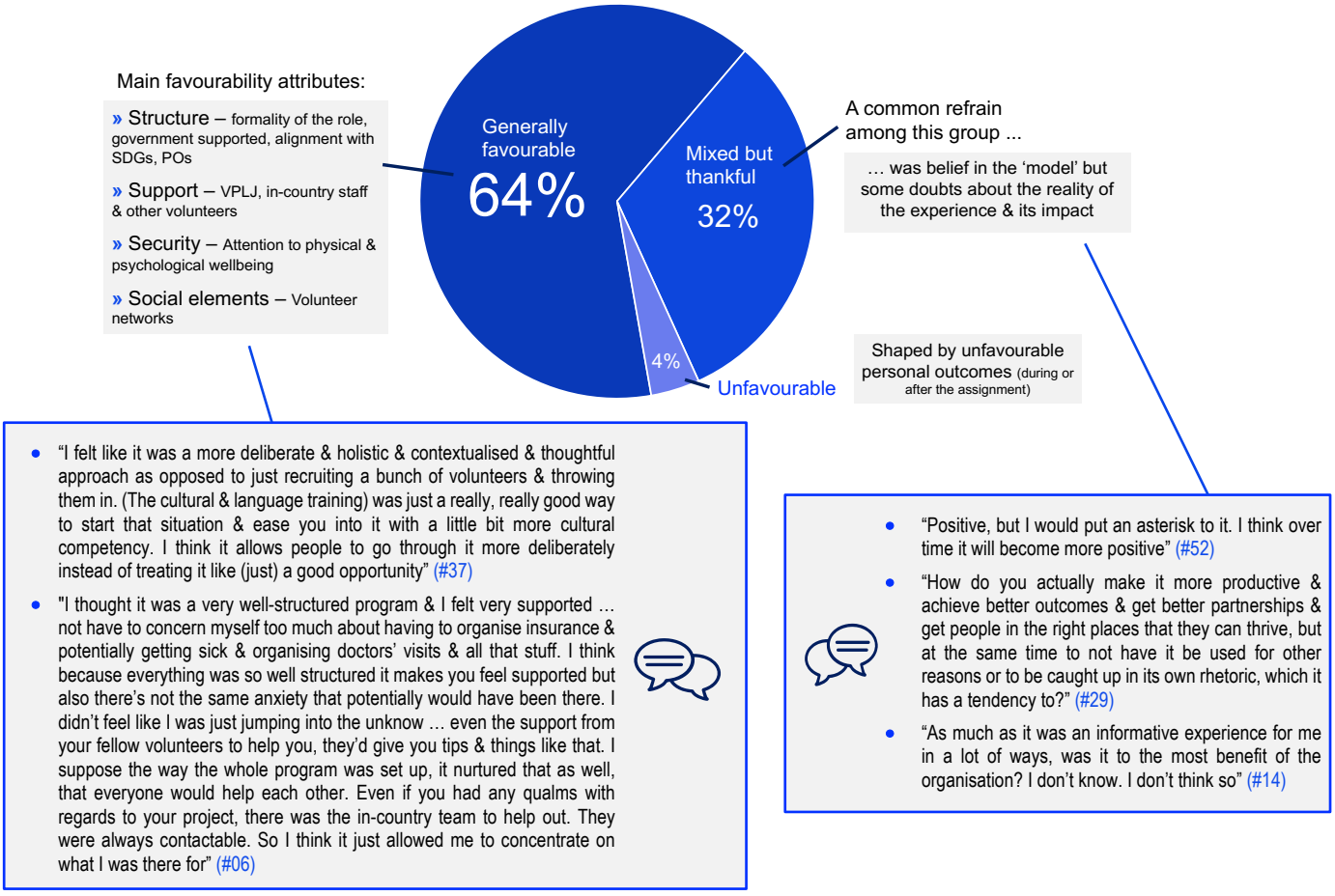
Participants across all categories are broadly supportive of Australia's aid and development program and value the role that international development volunteering plays in this. The latter has strengthened since T3. While some participants remain critical of aspects of the program's management and/or their assignments (e.g., PO readiness, position description accuracy, level of in-country support in some host countries), a pattern of increasing appreciation of the program's underlying model and theory of change is evident. Two *Veterans* identified strong support for and appreciation of development volunteering as the biggest impact of their volunteer assignment to date.[41]

Figure 7 shows that almost two thirds of respondents hold favourable attitudes towards the program at T4. The main favourability attributes are the program's: (i) structural features, which allow volunteers to focus better on their assignment (and to learn); (ii) formal and informal support; (iii) security provided by the program's legitimacy and wellbeing mechanisms, and (iv) social elements, notably the opportunities to develop relationships with other volunteers. Several participants compared their experiences favourable with prior corporate experiences working abroad or other international volunteer programs.

A smaller proportion (around one third) hold generally favourable views towards the program that are tempered by particular experiences relating to how the assignment or specific incidents were managed, the suitability of their PO, or the design of their role. Common responses from this group were beliefs in the development volunteer model but less enthusiasm for aspects of the program's management practices. Of note, the attitudes of several participants in this group were influenced favourably by their awareness of other volunteers whose contributions and/or experiences were more positive than their own. Most participants in this group expressed openness to a future volunteer assignment.

Just two participants (4%) experienced assignments that were unambiguously – although not exclusively - negative. Both had also reported mental health challenges arising from their experiences at T2/T3 - one associated with challenging in-country circumstances, one with a difficult post-repatriation period. Both have recovered somewhat and reported feeling more positive at T4 than they had previously been (Section 6.2). Both self-identify as minorities; one believes their minority status might have led to counterproductive experiences with PO employees (lack of acceptance). *Transitioners* were generally more likely than other groups to be less favourable about their experiences on the program.

Figure 7: Participants' overall attitude towards the program (summary)



3.5.2 Understanding International Development

Participants' understanding of the complexities of international development remains strong and for many has continued to grow over the past two years. Two participants identified their more refined understanding of international development as the biggest impact of their volunteer assignment to date.[42]

Responses at T4 reflect the complexity of understanding of international development issues reported at T3. Over half the sample report being well informed about issues, having a better understanding of international development practices and actors, and a more clear-eyed view of the challenges and approaches to development. The latter includes multiple participants expressing ongoing misgivings about inequalities, questionable efficacy and/or structural features relating to funding or (lack of) cooperation contributing to less favourable outcomes.[43]

Participants' **understanding of international development** is defined as their understanding of, the values, practices, assumptions & relationships that exist within international development work. These include: (i) recognising the complexities & diversity of international development, including its multiple objectives & geopolitical dimensions, (iii) developing a practical understanding of the contours of the development landscape (roles of & relationships between main stakeholders), (iv) recognising how their skills & interests "fit" within the sector, (v) understanding specific development issues more deeply, and (vi) recognising challenges of achieving development outcomes & strategies that are suited or adapted to effectively develop capacity.

Two features – both highlighted in previous reporting[44] - were again most commonly raised when participants discussed this topic:

- The (de)colonization of development practice and the need for more and better locally-led rather than externally-driven capacity development. Nine participants attribute their initial awareness of this to their involvement in the program and report increasing their understanding of this since their assignment ended.[45]
- The nexus between aid, development, diplomacy and geopolitics.[46] This awareness continues to be especially pertinent among volunteers whose assignments were in the Pacific region; see, for example, the **case study of Vivienne** on page 18 and the interview extract in the box below.

For some, their international development literacy has continued to develop since T3 through subsequent work in the sector. For this group, the insight gained from the assignment remains valued professionally – particularly understanding the roles and relationships of stakeholders in the sector, recognising how their skills and interests fit within the sector, and appreciating the challenges of achieving development outcomes.[47] One described the assignment *"[giving] really great insight into how [decolonised practice] actually looks. It's not just a word or an assignment. It's the practical, physical, tangible aspects of decolonising practice*" (#08).

Participants with limited prior exposure to the sector were among the most appreciative of their new understanding ("*I definitely got a big interest and drive in that space, and I want to work again in that space, I'd love to work for the aid program again*", #09). This includes the study's five *Non-working partners*, whose knowledge was seeded at VPLJ events and expanded by mixing with volunteers and others in-country. One of these (#32) described being "*only very superficially aware"* of Australia's aid and development program "*until we went*" (T3), but since then:

> *2021: I understand a lot more because I understand what the volunteers were doing in [the host country] and how that happens elsewhere and their involvement in that …* (T3)
>
> *2023: Now I actually think Australia does run a very good aid program. From when I look at it, they really have very capable people that go there, not to do it but to train them and leave that skill behind … that's the way to do it, to transfer those abilities and skills. I think they did pretty well in that … I didn't really know how AusAid worked at all, or how the volunteer system worked. Now that I understood it, I think it's a very intelligent way with all sorts of bonuses, like not just upskilling the locals but making that connection between the two countries. For the volunteers who've lived there, they go back to Australia and have a much better understanding, say of [the host country] and the people and the politics. That is an added bonus* (T4)

"It was really interesting being in [the host country], I don't know if it would be the case across all [the region], but it was so clear the role of China in […]. So, it was really interesting for me to see the difference in Australia and China and what's been implemented on the ground. And I think that was a really interesting learning to see how those kind of cogs all work together in a country like […]. So, for me that was a huge take away and something that I really valued from my time there. Especially, there was like a huge amount of work that the Chinese government were putting into [the host country], so to kind of see that influence, it was pretty amazing to see it firsthand … It was from talking to other volunteers, the briefings. I had an interesting perspective coming [in] but I learnt really quickly … my colleagues as well gave me little tid-bits … also, there's huge infrastructure projects taking place so you can see it, you can see it being built … the main thing I've been following is the Chinese put in a [infrastructure project] there, so I've been monitoring the progress of that, it's pretty fancy what they've done, so it's pretty amazing that they have this incredible infrastructure there now" (#31)

3.5.3 Applying International Development Literacy

Opportunities for participants to apply their international development knowledge and capabilities have risen since T3, when the impacts of COVID were still hampering participants' mobility and work opportunities.

T4 saw a sharp rise in the volunteers who reported applying the international development literacy gained during their assignments. Twenty-five participants (50%) described tangible examples of applying this to either their current work (12 participants) and/or current voluntary service, including those undertaking formal international volunteer assignments (16 participants).[48]

Many of these applications come from principles introduced during VPLJ activities. These relate to tasks such as developing the capacity of work colleagues (#09, #23, #29, #53), engaging with community stakeholders or protégés (#05, #15, #24, #44), mentoring (#15, #16) and working across cultures (#19, #25, #37) that volunteers are now using in their work in government, for-profit and non-profit sectors. As the **case study of Olivia** on the following page shows, this also comes from re-evaluating the value of international development volunteering programs.

Other participants have begun applying this knowledge to international development work. For instance, **as the extract in the box on the right illustrates**, participant #53 – an *Enhancer* who achieved a pre-assignment aspiration to find paid employment with a development-focused INGO in Australia (T1) - is benefitting from the assignment's practical field experience and the program's focus on locally-led capacity development.

"Thinking back on AVP, one thing which has really made me realise how much I learnt is when you come to work at an international NGO, not everyone has had experience in the field. It's a very different world working in Australia … it's a very different dynamic from being in the field, with very different sets of expectations. It's like working for HQ. You remember that you've really got to make those experiences from the field offices shine through your work & to really think about how we centre decolonisation in our work. You realise when you've had that AVP experience that you just don't know what is happening in those country offices & you don't understand that experience & to really spend more time teasing out those experiences & not trying to dominate the conversation. So for example, one of the things that we're trying to do is develop a 'train the trainer' approach. We want to pay young people for their efforts. One of the things I have pushed for is that in addition to Australian co-facilitators on these workshops, we should also have co-facilitators from other countries … because I think it's really important that their voices come through, particularly in speaking to youth activists from their country. And I think that is definitely something I have learnt from the [volunteer] program" – (#53, T4)

Participant #37, a *Launcher* whose assignment also enabled a pathway to international development and who now works in the Australian office of a different INGO, emphasised the value of her exposure to a new area of international development and to 'socialising' her to the sector:

> *… the AusVol role and the ensuing 3½ years really did give me that […] specialisation that now is my [job] title, so I don't think I would have been able to get there without this experience … I think it helped immensely. I think that this sector is kind of a black hole until you're in it, and so I think that the AusVol experience, being able to take the opportunity to actually get in it and learn the inner workings of the sector, that has been what has helped me to figure out where I want to go and actually understand what the sector is*

For participants using their international development literacy in their civic participation activities, most - although not all - are doing so in an international context. These include formal remote and in-country volunteer assignments and several partnerships with organisations or individuals that were instigated during the volunteer assignment. Participant #45, for instance, co-founded, with a friend from the host country, an online digital archive of visual and audio artefacts that aim to preserve and celebrate the culture of one of the host country's disadvantaged communities. Starting as "*a side project … a passion project*" (T3) and benefitting from the project management skills and local knowledge gained during the assignment, the project is "*ever-growing, there's four of us now and we're about to bring in two more people, we're hiring our first staff this month … we keep getting grants … and we got a bit of funding to hire a consultant to register the organisation properly*" (T4). His work on the project has involved "*a few collaborations with organisations in Australia … some of the archive team came to Australia.*" It has also led him to attend international conferences where he has raised health issues particular to the host country and sub-culture *("if I didn't have that personal experience, I wouldn't have the capacity to imagine what that was like and what it looks like,* T4).

Four volunteers have been appointed to boards advising not-for-profit or philanthropic organisations or agencies. All four attribute their appointment to their involvement with program and draw, in different ways, on their experiences as volunteers.[49]

Volunteer stories: Olivia - New appreciation about the impacts of development volunteering

Before joining the program, Olivia had conducted field work abroad in her university studies & had worked as a consultant in Australia on funded international development projects. In joining the program, she was interested in "*shifting my career more explicitly into … working in a space that's either connected to international development or international programs*" (T1). Although she knew the host country well, she wanted to "*live [there] for a longer period … build that deeper connection & understanding of culture & way of life*" (T1). Olivia believed that she had a strong understanding of Australia's aid program & development practices before joining the program, explaining "*I broadly pay attention to the news in that regard & through my Master's [degree] read about aspects of that a fair bit. I occasionally keep up with the dev policy blog*" (T1).

As well as "*giving me probably a lot more confidence to feel I could contribute in international development consulting*" (T2), Olivia's assignment exposed her to a different side of capacity development:

> *… I think it's probably that idea of relationships & also a sense that it can take a longer timeframe view of what's important & worthwhile …. & that's including things like social change. Some of the biggest & most interesting social change [involves] a slow build up & then maybe there's a sudden change but that's … part of it. So I feel that it's helped me find that perspective* (T2)

In particular, Olivia's experiences caused her to question "*what does sustainable systematic change look like?"* She articulated this in many ways during interviews, focusing (inter alia) on the need for changes to be locally (rather than externally) led, the importance of relationships in achieving this & the way volunteering is a unique mechanism to facilitate these relationships:

- *For me, the theme of social justice probably captures what my experience has added. There's some tricky ongoing things that can't easily be solved through simple interventions. Things like social justice issues. That's where you need a lot of solidarity & connection & support & networks to people & that's because you're perpetuating a set of values that says something is not okay & something else is okay, rather than a more technical problem that we can just do something about* (T3)
- *[The volunteer assignment] has probably helped inoculate me against a transactional efficiency-driven approach. Because I was working in consulting, as much as there was an attempt to be values driven, in the end efficiency trumps everything & you calculate your value by the deliverables you have produced ... so I think the whole volunteering model has inoculated against that* (T3)
- *I think there's a level of engagement that volunteers can do – international engagement, whether development or otherwise. And a situation we're in & we're trying to keep this sense of Australia connected & with the world & have influence. State officials & formal development programs primarily engage with [certain groups] & the country … but volunteers are willing to turn up as Australians, as their ordinary selves & bring their skills to form relationships that are almost outside of that whole state infrastructure & we're really set on achieving this outcome or that [outcome]* (T4)
- *[The volunteer program] does something quite different that I think needs to be protected. There's other things that do that as well, scholarship exchanges & certain types of tourism or visa programs … (but) I guess what the volunteer program does is create a reason & an 'in' to a community that would be much harder to create otherwise* (T4)

Although the impacts of the COVID pandemic meant that Olivia took *"a step backwards in terms of career progression*" (T3), she is "*glad that I did"* the assignment (T3). Now working in a government role, she says her understanding of the distinctive value proposition of development volunteering "*very much*" (T4) informs her current work, which includes programs in countries in the same region as her assignment:

- *I probably take a broader perspective to my work than I would have otherwise … more of a development lens than I would necessarily strictly need to at work … partially the level engagement with the new development policy & strategy from new government & thinking through what that looks like. Our agency has always had more of a relationship focus than other parts, because we both deliver the capacity building on the ground as well as design it, so to speak. So it is a very relationship-based place. But what that actually means isn't always obvious or how you set things up as a program* (T4)
- *In a government role where there are programs being delivered, you send people to try & achieve a certain outcome or deliverable & you need to demonstrate results. I think one of the advantages of a volunteer program as much as there is a whole M&E framework around it, there's actually much less attention paid to that. [Volunteering] is much more getting people into a place to live & experience things & build relationships & that is the strength of it in the end. And that is a very different type of activity & experience* (T3)

3.6 Civic Engagement and International Development Literacy: Key Findings and Emerging Implications

3.6.1 Key Findings

- The proportion of participants involved in voluntary service has risen since T1, although the overall intensity of that participation, while up since T3, is yet to reach the levels reported at T1. Participants' voluntary service is noticeably more skills-based and internationally focused than it was at T1. There is evidence that participants' experiences with the program have directly affected this – through interests generated, skills gained, or relationships formed. *Veterans* and *Launchers* are the most and least active participants in voluntary service respectively.
- Ongoing contact with POs has fallen slightly since T3 but remains widespread - including multiple participants who have re-engaged with POs since T3. More volunteers who retain contact with POs are supporting them via formal or informal voluntary service since T3 (up from 24% to 40%). With a few exceptions, this support is typically limited and ad-hoc. Nonetheless, POs that seek support from former volunteers generally continue to receive it.
- Uptake of and interest in formal volunteer assignments have grown since T3. This is most common among *Veterans*. One third of the sample had inquired about, applied for, or undertaken an international volunteer assignment in the preceding two years; 70% are open to a future assignment. Apparent in responses since T2 are fluctuations over time in individual participants' interest in formal volunteering.
- Work or caring responsibilities, relocating to new cities, or personal health are the main inhibitors to ongoing PO support. Inhibitors to formal international volunteer assignments include financial considerations, suitable timing, and concerns about assignment conditions, including the medium for remote assignments, which are generally viewed as less attractive and effective than in-country ones.
- Participants' interest in and understanding of the complexities of international development remain strong, and their appreciation for the distinctive contributions of development volunteering has strengthened since T3. These patterns apply equally to *Non-working partners*. An increasing number of volunteers reported applying this understanding in work and voluntary pursuits, reflecting mainly a rise in those working in international development, prosocial careers and/or internationally-focused civic activities since T3.

3.6.2 Emerging Implications[50]

» Supporting Volunteers' Ongoing Civic Participation

Reconciling responses from T3 and T4, the impacts of the volunteer assignment on participants' subsequent civic participation appear twofold. For some, participation in the program has been the impetus to contribute in new ways that build on relationships and interests formed during their assignments. A large part of this is now directed at either supporting POs and/or undertaking formal international volunteer assignments. For other volunteers, involvement with the program has furnished them with skills, awareness, legitimacy and confidence that create new and attractive opportunities – notably, by enabling them to meld professional benefits (e.g., résumé building) with meaningful and interesting contributions.

Notwithstanding the influence of COVID on the civic participation of this sample and the community more generally since 2020,[51] an emerging pattern of volunteers showing interest in and being involved with skills-based and internationally-oriented (SBIO) volunteering is clear (T3-T4). Most participants who have the time, resources, and interest to seek SBIO volunteering opportunities seem to be able to make it happen. Data from T3 and T4, including categorical responses from some participants, show a strong impact of the program experience on these changes. Thus, it seems clear that volunteers' experiences on the program, in conjunction with their professional and personal interests,[52] are important contributors to their growing interest and involvement in SBIO volunteering. Moreover, for a large number of volunteers, the program is the chief avenue through which such volunteering opportunities are sought. Thus, **the program is both a catalyst for and beneficiary of this trend to SBIO volunteering.**

Two questions are pertinent for the program to consider in relation to this trend. The first concerns the desirability of this pattern. While the prosocial impacts of SBIO could reasonably be expected to reap high value, sustainable, and expansive civic contributions with the potential to produce better impacts relative to pre-assignment levels,[53] the impact of these on other sectors or communities, including domestic, is unknown. Section 5.2.2 shows that volunteers who achieve a prosocial career transition have reported a dip in their civic participation. Likewise, a pivot to internationally-oriented volunteering may come at the expense of local contributions. Second, although most volunteers are able to find outlets for their interests in SBIO volunteer options, the program may be positioned to help establish pathways based on volunteers' professional and international experiences and interests (e.g., eliciting assignment opportunities in particular professional areas in particular countries). This insight may also be used as a basis to help volunteers pre-

empt possible (post-assignment) SBIO volunteering options before and during their assignments. Doing so may help them take advantage of opportunities to more closely align their learning and other experiences as volunteers during the program (e.g., VPLJ activities) with their post-assignment voluntary service goals.

On this, while the numbers are relatively few, the emergence of volunteers seeking, securing and succeeding as board members for INGOs and NGOs since their assignments may reflect an important manifestation of this SBIO trend. Contributions of alumni volunteers in such roles have the potential to expand the impacts of volunteers' civic participation and the program's reach. While such roles do not suit everyone, supporting alumni volunteers' pathways to suitable opportunities and/or training (e.g., through the Australian Institute of Company Directors) may be a valuable and complementary component of other alumni services.

» Helping Volunteers to Continue Developing International Development Literacy

The current findings reinforce a pattern that emerged at T3 and that is generally consistent with other studies[54] suggesting that the program's contribution to volunteers becoming more 'literate' in international development is:

- a substantial outcome that most volunteers, in different ways, take from their involvement with the program, and
- an outcome that is valued by volunteers, even if it is unexpected and even for volunteers with little interest in working in the sector.

These benefits extend equally to *Non-working partners* through their exposure to volunteers and to VPLJ activities.

Importantly, volunteers generally take pride in being part of Australia's international development program through their volunteering experience and recognise and value the distinctive contribution of development volunteering to this. This is despite misgivings about the design of some assignments and some cynical views about inauthentic 'public diplomacy'.[55] **These results show that involvement with the program is generally a valuable grounding for volunteers wanting to enter a career in international development. Yet the program's contribution goes beyond this through opportunities that all volunteers have to become better informed about, more interested in, and generally more supportive observers of international development.** One caveat on this claim – and one that the program may consider further research on – is the extent to which volunteers' experiences *accurately* reflect the practices and values that exist within the international development sector. This is salient to the extent that so many of the program's volunteers view the program as a (potential) bridge to further work in the sector, and as several participants drew strong inferences about the sector from their volunteer experience, including deciding to not pursue this in their career.

The findings so far suggest several ways that the program could strengthen both volunteers' *engagement* with international development issues, and their *knowledge and capabilities* associated with international development practices. For instance, VPLJ activities should continue to nurture improved understanding and consider ways to continue making opportunities for volunteers to engage with other volunteers and development practitioners in contexts where experiences and knowledge can be shared. Moreover, because volunteers' international development literacy is expected to benefit their performance during their assignment, opportunities to begin nurturing these outcomes prior to and in the early stages of the volunteer lifecycle may be advantageous. The findings also suggest that repeat volunteers may bring to their volunteer experiences important knowledge and capabilities that may improve their ability to succeed in the context of development work, and from which novice volunteers may also benefit (e.g., through exchanges at VPLJ activities and/or buddy/mentor systems in the same or different countries). Finally, the emergence of two distinct cohorts relating to international development – those with career objectives in the sector and others with a more general interest - suggests that different approaches to engage and inform different groups of volunteers on these issues may have benefits.

» Supporting Volunteers to Continue Assisting their POs

Inferring meaningful trends from the changing patterns of PO contact and support since T2 is hampered by disruptions caused by COVID. This includes changes that the pandemic instigated in the priorities for some participants and the composition and activities of many POs.

On the one hand, the changing patterns of PO contact and support over time – especially differences between volunteer types – show signs of a natural 'lifecycle' of peaks and troughs that may reflect a combination of POs' changing conditions (notably, hosting subsequent volunteers, staff members' willingness to continue contact and/or seek advice) and/or volunteers' evolving circumstances (e.g., subsequent paid or unpaid pro-social work) or skills (e.g., abilities to maintain networks).

On the other hand, some patterns may be indicative of emerging relationships. For instance, data is beginning to show a relationship between assignment duration and PO contact/support. Volunteers who completed relatively short-term assignments - before COVID repatriations - have retained contact with POs but are less likely to provide ongoing support. A smaller proportion of repatriated volunteers retains contact,

but this contact is more likely to involve formal voluntary support. Among the possible explanations for this are: (i) repatriated volunteers' desire to attend to "unfinished business" with their POs (see Section 3.4.2), (ii) the benefit of these volunteers' deeper contextual understanding of PO conditions – stemming from longer-term assignments - rendering their contributions more valued by POs, or (iii) the strength of the interpersonal bonds between these volunteers and the PO. The latter may also explain higher levels of ongoing contact and support among unaccompanied volunteers. All three are relationships that can be explored in T5 interviews.

Declining contact with or support for POs over time is not surprising, especially as volunteers (re)commence work or other civic participation activities since COVID. It may be appropriate in some situations – for instance, when POs begin hosting new volunteers or when volunteers lack the local or contextual insight needed to provide effective support. At the same time, nurturing connections between volunteers and POs offers potential benefits that extend beyond the relationships examined in the LSAV to date. Although not addressed directly in interviews to date, it is feasible that volunteers and POs that do retain contact act as conduits to connect other individuals or organisations beyond just the volunteer-PO dyad. Through this, volunteers' ongoing contact with POs has potential to contribute to building wider sets of productive (international) relationships. For example, repeat volunteers have the potential to be nodes connecting past and current POs. POs may be able to connect former and current volunteers with similar interests. Volunteers may find ways to connect domestic civic and/or professional organisations with POs.

LSAV participants have shared different examples of these in interviews, most of which they have instigated informally rather than being invited into via requests from the program (e.g., just a few participants have been involved in handovers to a subsequent volunteers - see the box 'Alumni volunteers who have returned to the host country – An untapped resource?' on page 36). The program's attention to structural support for POs and volunteers to extend these relationships may make the relationships and the benefits accrued more mutually beneficial. The prevalence and impacts of these wider relationships are also topics that can be explored in subsequent interviews in this study.

4 Global Literacy and Connections

4.1 Overview and Background

This section deals directly with the program's objectives that "volunteers (current and returned) promote greater cultural awareness and build stronger connections between partner countries and Australia" and the Australian Government objective to foster more globally literate and connected Australians. It addresses participants':

i. **Ongoing engagement with the host country**. This encompasses participants' psychological connection to the host country, as evident through behaviours like monitoring media, viewing content, conducting or planning return visits, informing themselves about host-country issues, and advocating for or promoting the host country (Section 4.2);

ii. **Cross-cultural knowledge and capabilities** that participants developed during their assignments and have applied to their work and life since then. This includes "culture-specific knowledge and capabilities" that relate to the host country or region, and which strengthen participants' connections to the country/region (Section 4.3.1), as well as "culture-general knowledge and capabilities" that have application in settings beyond the host country (Section 4.3.2); and

iii. **Global networks**, defined as professional or personal relationships that have strong international dimensions. These include relationships with host-country nationals, or HCNs (Section 4.4.1), and with expatriate communities (Section 4.4.2). The latter *excludes* relationships with fellow program volunteers, which are addressed separately in Section 6.5.

The section concludes by distilling the core findings and considering emerging implications for the program's volunteer support and management (Section 4.5).

Background: Summary of participants' global literacy and connections (T1-T3)

The sample exhibited high levels of international work, travel and/or study experiences at T1, although their knowledge of and experiences in their host countries were more limited. Forty-seven (94%) had lived abroad previously. More than half had completed prior international volunteer assignments, although in some cases these were relatively brief group-based (e.g., voluntourism) and/or unstructured experiences. Four (8%) spoke English as a foreign language, and 27 (54%) reported some degree of competence in a second language. Although most participants identified as 'Australian (Other)' (31/50), others reported national identities (by ancestry) as Scottish, Chinese, French, Australian Aboriginal, Irish, Malaysian, German, Italian, and English. At T1, most participants expressed confidence in their ability to cope with expected cross-cultural challenges.

Participants' experience in & knowledge of the host country at T1 was weaker. Those with host-country language proficiency (20%) or networks (28%) tended to be younger participants with fewer years of professional experience than others in the study. Most participants' knowledge of the host country came from second-hand sources.

By T3, all but four participants were maintaining some form of engagement with the host country (e.g., more intensive ongoing cognitive engagement, regular contact with host-country nationals, or strong emotional and/or identity-based connection), especially those who had some prior understanding of the culture and/or were wanting a future international career. Connections were especially strong for volunteers who worked with a designated counterpart in the PO & where a common language was shared.

Outside culture-specific knowledge & capabilities, participation in the program has been beneficial for developing aspects of cultural intelligence – notably, interpersonal flexibility & global mindset that just over half of the sample found valuable in their work & relationships in the 12 months since completing their assignments (T3).

4.2 Host Country Engagement

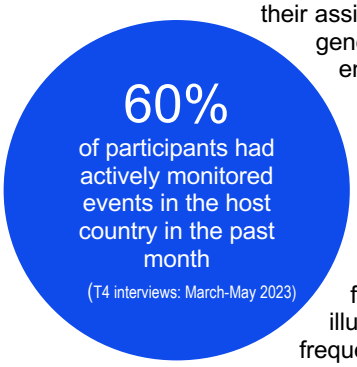
The evidence from T3 and T4 suggest that participants' cognitive and emotional engagement with the country hosting their assignments is authentic and has strengthened since T1. The frequency and intensity of this engagement has declined for almost half the sample since their assignments finished (T2). Nonetheless, most remain interested in and cognisant of events in the host country and continue to hold positive feelings towards the country and its people as a result of their volunteering experiences.

All except three participants (47/50, 94%) report some level of ongoing cognitive or emotional engagement with the host country at T4. Eighteen (36%) exhibit high levels of engagement with the host country and/or region, roughly the same as T3 (20/54, 37%). Of the 18 participants who were classified as 'highly engaged' at T3, 13 remain strongly engaged at T4.[56] Two of these strengthened their engagement during this period.

Engagement with the host country refers to participants' ongoing psychological connection to the country in which they volunteered. It is evident through behaviours such as monitoring media, viewing content, conducting or planning return visits, or informing themselves about host-country issue via study, social media or other sources (cognitive engagement). It also includes emotional engagement, evident through expressions of positive affect, warmth towards HCNs & the culture, & personal identity. Participants with high levels of engagement exhibit practices such as:

- Actively continuing to monitor with heightened interest events in host countries
- Reporting positive feelings towards, and/or a shared emotional bond with, the country or its citizens
- Having regular ongoing contact with one or more HCNs and expressing emotional connection or closeness toward them; and/or
- Expressing a professional or personal identity tied to the host country

In general, younger volunteers – *Launchers* and *Enhancers* – exhibit higher levels of host-country engagement and have sustained this engagement at higher levels across the three years since completing their assignments.[57] *Veterans* is the group showing the strongest declines, albeit from generally high levels at T3.[58] Women have retained higher levels of host-country engagement than men across the three post-assignment surveys (T2-T4).



Nonetheless, across the sample there were general declines in the frequency and intensity of host-country engagement since T3, and participants were largely conscious of this. Rates of actively seeking information about the host country has risen since T3 for just three participants; in contrast, 19 reported lower engagement levels than T3.

The interview extracts in the box below are broadly illustrative of a more laisse faire level of engagement than immediately following their assignment. To illustrate this decline, the table at **Attachment 6** highlights the change in the frequency and depth of host-country engagement by juxtaposing responses from a sample of participants at T3 and T4 on this issue.

Typical responses reflecting sustained but declining cognitive engagement with host countries (T4)

- "I'm on Facebook with the old [host-country] groups I had over there. They're always coming through & I can just look at it & see how things are going. They're nothing more than just voyeuristic groups, just information coming through. I don't really get involved" (#03)
- "I follow what's happening on social media on a Facebook group of [a local] newspaper, so yes I do keep an eye on what's going on" (#10)
- "I'm still vaguely following some [host country] news & every so often I have to ask my [HCN friend about an event]" (#44)
- ""I'm viewing from afar. You read the comments & the questions & all that type of thing [on social media feeds], it reconnects you & it reminds you a little the experiences that you have. I don't necessarily comment on them because I am not there" (#23)
- "Not as much as I should, it's probably more just broadly world news most of the time" (#29)
- "Peaks & troughs, I'd say. There's times when I get really interested in it & will read really comprehensively & go on big deep dives to get into a particular issue, & then I honestly forget about it or other stuff comes up, & then something will spark my interest again" (#07)

The three 'items' most likely to attract participants' interests in the host country are: (i) events in POs ("*just to see that they're still implementing the learnings and things like that, every now and again I do pop on and have a look*", #31), (ii) national political issues ("*I just look at it and see how things are going. The politics is interesting because they went through a huge change just after I left with a new prime minister and so that's been interesting as well",* #04), and (iii) social and cultural issues ("*I saw the […] International Film Festival was happening this weekend on Facebook. That was a fun night [when I was there]",* #08).

Participants' main sources of information about the host country remain largely unchanged from T3. These include:

- Direct contact with former colleagues or friends in or from the host country via direct messaging ("*a lot of the people I chat to on WhatsApp on a daily basis are those that are living there",* #45).
- The social media feeds of individuals, organisations or interest groups ("*I follow local politicians in […], Australian politicians … I'm on that […] expats' page, a Facebook page*", #24). This includes the Australian High Commission or Embassy in the host country, which remains a source of local information.[59]
- Subscription newsletters or Substacks produced by host-country specialists including academics and journalists ("*I look online and look at the independent journalists who are reporting from there every now and then as to what's going on*", #42)
- Australian print and electronic media including ABC Pacific ("*If it pops up I'll read news online. I'm very selective about what I read online because it's all so terrible. But I was interested in what was happening there*", #25; "*More through the Guardian or international papers like that, occasionally just going into a website to have a look*", #16)
- Host-country or regional English language media (e.g., domestic networks, Radio Free Asia, special interest podcasts) ("*it's still an interest of mine … if a documentary comes out on […], it's definitely something I will watch*", #35).

Participants' professional and social connections in the host country and their host-country cognitive engagement were strongly associated and appear to abet each other. That is, those with professional or work interests in the host country and region monitored events more carefully and also had access to more and better information. In-country HCN and expatriate networks were common sources of information via direct messaging and social media feeds, especially on highly localised news. Conversely, media reports

were also an impetus for participants to reach out to HCNs ("*Sometimes when I see big news I'm like, I text it to […], and say, 'Hey, what are your thoughts on this?*'", #53). Several participants reiterated the value of ICOPs (and to a lesser extent the PDB) to instigating an interest in the country or region's history, politics or culture that has been a foundation for continued engagement. The implications of this relationship are considered further in Section 4.5.2.

Nine participants returned to the host country between T3 and T4,[60] mainly to "*see my colleagues again … and see some friends*" (#46), for work, or:

> *… to close the chapter a bit, we left in such a hurry and there was a lot unfinished … now it feels like that chapter is properly closed. And from a practical sense, I had some stuff that I'd left there that I had to go and pick up. So just to revisit, reminisce, have a holiday and get my stuff (#07)*

Two of the five participants who had plans at T3 to return to work in the host country had done so; just one of these remained in the host country at the time of the interview (T4).[61] Three participants had plans to return to the host country for a holiday in 2023 after being interviewed[62] and several others expressed a desire to ("*It's a special place and I do want to go back. I've told my partner. He's keen. He wants to go*", #35).[63] Others hoped to return but were prevented by restrictions on travel to the host country, work schedules, and/or family or other commitments.

Six participants reported hosting or supporting in other ways visits from friends, former colleagues or associates from the host country to Australia:

> [*My help] contributed to her and her husband getting PhD scholarships here, she'd sent me her proposal to see if I would have a look at it* (#43)

> *We picked them up from the airport, we drove them to the apartment, when they were going to get a lease … all the things that we're used to, where do you get furniture, where do you shop, how does it all work? We sort of did the opposite exchange with them* (#53)

Strong positive emotional connections with the host country were common across volunteer and age groups and expressed through descriptions of their "*very fond memories*" (#36), the country having "*a big place in my heart*" (#14) and "*feel(ing) homesick*" for the host country (#04).

Strong connections with HCNs form an important part of this emotional connection. One referred to former colleagues as "*my [host-country] sisters*" (#49). Another (#26), who had recently visited friends and former colleagues during a holiday in the host country felt:

> *"[HCNs] are my family, they're my friends. If anything, I'm probably closer to them than some of my corporate friends who haven't seen me in three years*

A small number reported these emotional connections continuing for some family members who visited them during the assignment (e.g., #22, #48).

As the box on the following page illustrates ("**The pet connection: Artefacts and animals as reminders of the volunteer assignment**"), emotional bonds with the host country were carried through other means – objects and pets – as reminders of the volunteer experience.

Factors influencing cognitive engagement patterns at T4

- Access to information: Several participants associated their declining cognitive engagement with decreasing media coverage of events in the host country, notably less frequent reporting from the region on issues like COVID and/or political/civil issues. A small number attributed declining engagement to their decision to close social media accounts ("*I went off social media, but people do still email me sometimes and I still have my accounts I just don't even interact with my social media accounts*", #43).
- Personal and professional commitments: Participants with ongoing work and/or personal relationships with the host country were most cognitively engaged ("*I think I'm more engaged with [the host country] than I am in Australia to be honest politically*", #37). In contrast, participants' commitments to work or volunteering in different host countries or sectors were a common explanation for their decreasing engagement.

The pet connection: Artefacts & animals as reminders of the volunteer assignment

Beyond participants' expressed engagement with & feelings towards the host country, tangible remnants of these connections were apparent in other ways. The email 'signature block' of two participants reflect affiliation with the host country. During interviews, two participants wore clothing associated with the host country & two others displayed artefacts (photographs, a carving) that were visible during the interview. Five participants, including these two, shared stories about artefacts from the host country – including gifts from POs or friends - that remained meaningful to them ("*little decorations & stuff we bought, photos, all that kind of stuff*").

For three participants, their emotional bond with the host country is strengthened by being owners of pets during their assignment. One couple adopted two dogs they had "*found in a bad way on the street*" (email); another "*rescued a kitten*" (T2), which "*because of the isolation [in the host country] was such a saving grace for me, such an important part of my experience*" (T2).

In both cases, the participants were forced to repatriate without the animals & devoted substantial time, energy & money relocating the pets to Australia. At the time, one described their own repatriation as "*very, very traumatic … I was mainly thinking about the dogs … we're waiting for them [in Australia] but they can't get a flight out … we miss them dreadfully, we really do*" (T2). The other reported "*most of my emotion*" associated with repatriating coming from "*leaving [the pet] there … I was still packing up my house & I hadn't arranged anything for my cat. And I had a major panic attack, I was sitting on the floor, couldn't breathe, tingly arms, just a full on panic attack*" (T2).

In both cases, the stresses of the post-assignment period were exacerbated by the absence of these pets. All three reported difficult repatriations (T2 and T3). One described receiving "*lots of photos*" of the animals soon after leaving them in the host country with friends, which "*helps to keep the worry at a medium level rather than a high level*" (T2), but also feeling "*very unsettled*" (T4) until being reunited with their dogs 12 months after their own return: "*We've got our dogs back so its like everything has come back to normal again, that was hugely instrumental in feeling like we were back together, in the right place again."*

For the other participant, reuniting with her cat "*felt so good … [the cat] is such an important part of my life*" (T4). She described a recent example when the cat recently fell ill, when:

> *… I was in tears, I was distraught … if it was my other cat I wouldn't have been so worried … I think it's just that connection to what she was for me in [the host country] & that period of time that just brings all that up. So it's such a strange thing, but I think when you are in country your experiences are just more intense, whether they are positive or negative or neutral. They are just intense experiences, everything is intense & it becomes the norm, but then when you come back home & your norm drops down to [a] pretty calm norm, anything that links back to that, I feel myself anyway just flicks me up to that extreme kind of reaction*

In both cases, the pets have contributed to the participants' happiness during the assignment & since being reunited in Australia. The pets also affirm their sense of attachment to the host country. For one couple, they have also been an opportunity to discuss their time as volunteers:

> *it's been a nice little "in" to talk about [the host country] sometimes, because people always ask what sort of dogs they are, or what breed they are. And we go, "We lived in [the host region] and we brought them back, they're street dogs". And then sometimes people go, "Oh what were you doing there?" And blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. So that's one of the most frequent times that we get talking about [the host country], actually through the dogs … you end up talking a bit more about what actual life is like as well, which is kind of nice, it's a memory of it*

Photo provided by study participant

4.3 Cross-cultural Knowledge and Capabilities

Responses at T4 support earlier findings that participants' development of cross-cultural proficiencies has been one of the strongest and most valued impacts of their involvement with the program.

Twelve participants identified improved cross-cultural proficiency as the biggest impact of their volunteer assignment. Nine of these identified "culture-general knowledge and capabilities",[64] four identified "culture-specific knowledge and capabilities" (one participant identified both).[65]

Application of cross-cultural proficiencies in different settings remains high. Thirty-nine different participants (78%) reported instances of applying cross-cultural knowledge and capabilities they developed during their volunteer assignments: around two-thirds of these in the workplace (63%), and a third (37%) in non-work settings that included study, volunteering, and socially.

"Culture-general knowledge and capabilities" are generally reported as more transformational and more applicable to different aspects of work and life than "culture-specific knowledge and capabilities".

Distinguishing culture-specific & culture-general knowledge & capabilities

In assessing how participants' experiences on the program influenced their cross-cultural knowledge and skills, we distinguish

Culture-specific knowledge & capabilities (Section 4.3.1) relate to the host country or region. It includes understanding of cultural practices & values, as well as non-culture information pertaining to the host country (e.g., understanding political context or legal system, language proficiency, contextual & historical knowledge). These strengthen participants' connections to the host country & contribute to the depth of awareness of & comfort operating in that specific context.

Culture-general knowledge & capabilities (Section 4.3.2), in contrast, improve participants' cultural awareness or enhance cross-cultural competence but which are not related to a specific culture/country (e.g., sensitivity to cultural differences generally, understanding the impacts of stereotypes or cultural biases, appreciating different ways of life, communicative flexibility). These are more readily transferable across national borders & connect participants to a broader global community.

Young volunteers – *Launchers*, *Enhancers* and *Transitioners* – were most likely to report benefitting from their cross-cultural knowledge and capabilities in workplaces. *Veterans* and *Imposed Transitioners* reported using these more commonly in civic participation.

The following two sub-sections summarise the "culture-specific knowledge and capabilities" (Section 4.3.1) and "culture-general knowledge and capabilities" (Section 4.3.2) that participants link to their program experiences. The sections address both the proficiencies that participants (at T4) report having developed during their assignment and those that they continue to apply in their work and lives.

4.3.1 Developing and Using Culture-specific Knowledge and Capabilities

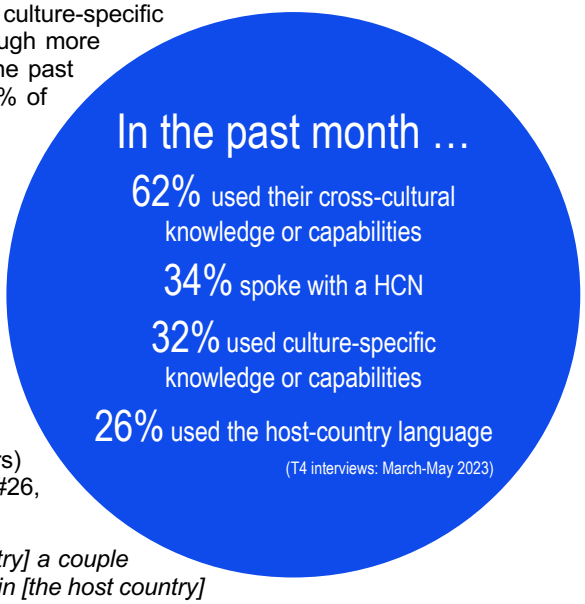
Participants continue to view their volunteer assignments as important mechanisms contributing to a richer, more nuanced and generally positive understanding of the host country. This includes most participants who reported familiarity with the host culture and its language at T1.

Most participants still hold elements of the host-country capabilities as valuable. Beyond language and culture, a deeper understanding of features of the host country like the security infrastructure (#29), social dynamics (#15), government machinations (#17), religious practices (#20), positive and negative cultural traits (#12), and its attitudes towards foreigners (#36) were reported. Participants explained these changes in different ways, but as the extracts below illustrate, most attribute it to the depth of cultural immersion that their assignment provided:

- *You feel more connected because you've been part of the community. When people talk to me about travelling as a tourist to those countries … I dismiss their experiences in some ways … I think I have a better understanding, of course, from living like we did in the community* (#25)
- *I think it just burrows into your psyche … it's because you're living and breathing it. I was lucky in my role because I was able to go around to many villages over [a lot of the country]. A lot of those [visits were brief], sort of in and out, in and out, but you do get a better understanding of island life. Very different to what you see on the postcards* (#03)

Most opportunities for participants to continue to build the knowledge and capabilities developed during the assignment come from their ongoing relationships with HCNs (Section 4.4.1), engagement with the host country (Section 4.2), and opportunities to apply this knowledge and related capabilities. Thus, the participants continuing to develop these in the aftermath of their in-country experience are those with friends, interests and/or existing knowledge/skills that they continue to apply. While the quality of ICOPs in different countries were perceived to vary greatly, these were again identified as important catalysts to nurture interest, contacts and foundational local knowledge that continue to be appreciated.

There is evidence that participants' use and application of culture-specific knowledge and capabilities have increased since T3, mainly through more professional opportunities: 16/50 (32%) reported using these in the past month, 11 at work – representing 22% of all participants and 34% of those working full-time at T4.



Participants draw directly on their culture-specific knowledge and capabilities in different ways. Two conduct formal in-house training programs for work colleagues in Australia about the host-country culture and language (#19, #29). Others work with diaspora colleagues or clients ("*The skills were directly applicable, the cultural knowledge is pretty important, about 50 percent of my current colleagues are [HCNs*]", #41), are regularly called upon at work for their culture-specific expertise in the region (#04, #46), or have been consulted by friends and colleagues about the host country (e.g., travel advice, #30).

Four reported advising expatriates (including program volunteers) about an impending assignment in the host country (#02, #08, #26, #29):

One of my team members, my colleagues, went to [the host country] a couple of weeks ago to run a […]. And so navigating the gender dynamics in [the host country] is obviously a different culture but it's the ways in which things don't always quite run as you expect them to and that's that cultural difference thing. So [I helped to] draw them out in terms of what that experience was like (#29)

Participant #45 was hired for a "*dream job*", in part because his cultural and language proficiency would be beneficial to interactions with CALD clients, a proportion of which were from the host country. Participant #37 draws on her experiences in the host country in her work for an intergovernmental agency, managing projects that focus on the host country. While she and her colleagues work remotely from a neighbouring country for security reasons, she found her time in the host country:

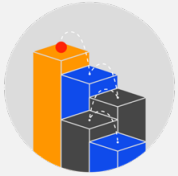
… was really important, those seven, eight months, when I actually learnt so much about the culture. I feel like you have to be there to understand it and to be in it to see it. I think that solidified my understanding of the culture. And then seeing how to translate that to a virtual world. I think that solid understanding really, really helps. I see colleagues from other […] agencies who've been working on [the host country] for a couple of years but haven't had the actual chance to be physically in [it] and they might be lacking in some of that cultural knowledge, and even though they've been working with [HCN] colleagues for a couple of years I think that they didn't have that basis of understanding

Outside the workplace, culture-specific knowledge and capabilities were applied during subsequent volunteer assignments (#17), studies (#28, #29), and with friends or colleagues (#01, #04, #41, #45, #46).

Ten participants continue to use and/or study the host-country language regularly. Five of these had no language proficiency prior to the assignment (T1). Four of these five have a partner or work relationships from the host country. Thirteen participants reported using the host country language in the past month at work or with friends. Others reported using it periodically, although most participants have little interest in learning and little opportunity to use the language ("*We have eight or nine phrases between [my partner] and I, and every now and again I catch myself trying to remember it, but it's not a language that comes up organically*", #12). Others reported being inspired to begin learning another language by work or experiences during assignment.

Participants were reluctant to define themselves as specialists or experts in the host country. Nonetheless, 10 participants (20%) – some (although not all) of whom had vast experiences in and knowledge of the host country prior to T1 – have professional identities or reputations that draw strongly on their host-country or host-region knowledge and experiences in ways that could reasonably be described as nascent "host-country expertise."[66] Three of these had no or limited prior host-country knowledge at T1. The **case study of Bronwen** on the following page is one example of this expertise infiltrating subsequent work and voluntary activities with widespread benefits.

Volunteer stories: Bronwen - Weaving a web around the Pacific



Despite having only vague ideas about possibly "*ending up [her career] in aid work*" when she applied to volunteer (T1), Bronwen's volunteer assignment has transformed her professional life & the nature of her civic participation. Her career is now largely structured around expertise & contacts relating to the Pacific region & to her professional domain (health) which were instigated & nurtured during her assignment. Without these, she says, "*my life now would be very different, one hundred percent*" (T4).

Before joining the program, Bronwen had limited involvement with community organisations or voluntary work ("*Not really to be honest, I move a lot [for work]*", T1). Agreeing to represent the PO voluntarily at a conference during her assignment changed this. It was here that she met some Australian health development workers who were facilitating workshops & providing training in new medical interventions. Through this, she says, "*they got me to help them implement it into one of the hospital wards here. Which is not strictly [my assignment] but I think having my involvement helped a lot … [now] they've actually asked me to come back [to the host country] at the end of [the month] with them. So, I will happily do that*" (T2).

Soon after completing her assignment (pre-COVID), Bronwen began a series of return visits to the host country - and later other countries in the region - to lead some of these programs ("*once we started, one thing led to another & we've just taken on more and more*", T3). These unpaid international visits, arranged through her relationship with the health development workers, became a regular part of Bronwen's schedule for several years (pre- & post-COVID). They have allowed Bronwen to (i) gain experience & "*street cred*" (T3) that benefits this work, (ii) deepen her cultural & professional knowledge, & (iii) strengthen relationships with colleagues & friends in the host country that are important to her success in this role.

Since her assignment, Bronwen has become an informal leader of sorts & a connection node for members of her profession in the host country & the Pacific region. A new paid role spans Australia & a Pacific country, yet she continues to make multiple return trips to the host country & neighbouring countries to share her knowledge & oversee health projects that she had managed with local counterparts ("*I only got back yesterday … I'll continue to provide some voluntary support from afar … [my current employer] supports me to maintain those relationships … I can still provide some advice & have involvement rather than just leave them hanging*", T4).

When the pandemic prevented international travel, Bronwen became an active contributor to an online forum supporting health sector staff in the region:

> *We emailed some [colleagues] in the Pacific that we knew & they emailed their friends & it just spread a little. Anyone working in [my profession] can jump onto this forum & get advice from other people about how they would do things & what might be good. Some of the little things we learned in [the host country] were quite helpful. It was a really nice time for all the Pacific countries to realise we're all in this together. There were so many things that we were all trying to figure out at the same time* (T3)

Bronwen now also co-chairs a "*community of practice for global [professionals] … 200 or 300 people*" where "*everyone can contribute*". In this role, in 2023 she organised & hosted a regional meeting in her hometown ("*we had about 25 organisations … the dream is that we can all communicate & collaborate a little bit to avoid overlap*", T4). At the time of the interview (T4), Bronwen was planning activities & training initiatives for her remaining two years as co-chair.

Additionally, Bronwen was selected to represent Australia in a dialogue group that links young leaders from Australia & the host country ("*we all met up & had a week together in Sydney & chatted about [the host country] & Australia's relationship & issues, which was a really good way to get a lot of different perspectives on whether the aid that Australia's providing is beneficial or harmful … we're still editing an outcomes paper that will go to the governments of both Australia & [the host country]",* T4).

The regional dimensions of Bronwen's professional expertise are now important parts of her professional identity. They also inspired her to complete postgraduate studies with an international focus "*pretty related to the volunteer stuff*" (T3) & which resulted in research publications focusing on her volunteer work in the host country. Importantly, this expertise – seeded during the volunteer assignment – is now central to her work. According to Bronwen, this professional & civic "*inflection point*" (T3) stemmed directly from her volunteer assignment in 2019, & especially from "*saying yes to that [extra-curricular volunteering] on the side when I was there*" (T4). In the subsequent years, she seems to be on the way towards fulfilling a prediction that she made soon after her second interview: "*Definitely the beginning of something exciting for me, I think!*" (e-mail).

4.3.2 Developing and Using Culture-general Knowledge and Capabilities

In general, participants report using and benefitting from "culture-general knowledge and capabilities" substantially more regularly than "culture-specific knowledge and capabilities" over the past two years.

The two main culture-general capabilities identified in 2021- "behavioural flexibility" and "global mindset" - were again commonly reported in 2023 as residual sets of capabilities that participants both attribute, in part, to their experiences on the program and that participants see as valuable.

» Behavioural Flexibility

The most common forms of behavioural flexibility with workplace applications are communication - e.g., using language grading when communicating with CALD colleagues or clients (#04, #12, #21) and general sensitivity to intercultural issues when collaborating as managers (#23, #53) or mentors (#15), or when providing services to clients (#35, #45, #46). These examples occurred in diverse Australian workplaces (government, corporate, non-profit) that comprise staff or clients from CALD and other minority groups. A smaller number have more direct applications of these proficiencies in organisations or roles with specific international/global objectives and projects (e.g., INGOs, intergovernmental agencies).

Behavioural flexibility refers to transferable interpersonal capabilities that participants felt had arisen from their contacts with HCNs or other foreigners, which have application outside the host country and that make them better relationship builders with a range of people (establishing trust, having genuine conversations, establishing rapport with different stakeholders), collaborators and/or communicators (e.g., explaining things simply, needing to listen more carefully, giving and eliciting feedback).

Global mindset refers to cognitive capabilities and perspectives which enable participants to view people, groups, situations, or events more holistically, empathetically and/or flexibly (e.g., broader perspective, understanding one's own culture, appreciating cultural differences, comfort in multicultural settings).

Nine participants reported using these capabilities in their work with Indigenous Australians and/or refugees or migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds:[67] ("*I'm much more relaxed about working with Aboriginal people when things don't work out. I just think, oh well, we'll work it out tomorrow. And I think that's come partly from working in the [host country], and just getting used to that process – that's the way white people work, and you don't have to work like that*", #05).

A few participants reported that they were able to transfer intercultural capabilities like relationship-building, leading, or managing to particular groups with different identities (#09, #23, #31). Likewise, others saw "*huge amounts*" of value (#24) in behavioural flexibility to support their general work performance, including their efforts to build or nurture interpersonal relationships with colleagues or other stakeholders (#06, #24, #45):

> *Before I went to [the host country], I suppose I didn't really value my connection I had with my work colleagues. I saw them just as colleagues that I'd go to work, I'd interact with briefly, and then leave. But I suppose after my time in […], the bonds that I formed when I was in […] with fellow volunteers and even with the local staff that I worked with, I took that back with me [to Australia] and I found that my relationships with my colleagues was a lot less superficial. So I appreciated them more and I feel like I built more of a rapport with them. And I feel that by building that rapport with them, I also improved my relationship … I felt more connected with them and there was more teamwork, and we were on the same level … and I found that just me changing my attitude to the way I interacted with the people that I work with, it made my experience of going to work and working there a lot better* (#06)

» Global Mindset

In the current reporting period, global mindset was associated most strongly with participants' increased sensitivity to cultural biases and recognising alternative ways of seeing the world. One extreme example of this is the **case study of Nancy** on the following page, whose understanding of her identity as a minority in Australia was strongly influenced initially by her experience volunteering and later after returning to Australia.

A common example of participants increasingly benefitting from this capability is their questioning or better understanding their own biases and the benefit of alternative approaches and mindsets informing their work. Participants shared examples from a range of situations. Some of these are identified in the box "**Examples of applying culture-general knowledge and capabilities in professional settings**" on page 51.

Beyond these examples, participants who have taken on subsequent remote or in-country volunteer assignments or relocated abroad[68] reported benefits adjusting and forming relationships ("*you learn how to adjust, be flexible, and take it on*", #33; "*Absolutely in terms of getting used to working with a different culture, different ways of working, it definitely helped",* #40). Others directly attributed the cross-cultural proficiencies gained during the assignment to opportunities that they may not otherwise have received – for example, being selected for jobs, study opportunities and committees ("*It was a big part of me getting the role*", #45). Four participants provided anecdotes of them sharing specific events from their volunteer assignment with colleagues or subordinates at work to illustrate a point or emphasise a certain action or outcome.

Volunteer stories: Nancy's personal & professional turning point

Nancy's entry to the volunteer program came soon after she completed a post-graduate international development degree & followed a period volunteering domestically with development-focused charities. For her, volunteering was "*a personal & professional decision … this will open professional opportunities … I've always wanted to work overseas & volunteer*" (T1).

Nancy's assignment was "*professionally very rewarding"* but "*definitely challenging"*. She says *"living in a different country away from my support network*" helped her "*grow as a person … I learned some very important life skills … it made me appreciate my situation personally, as well*" (T2). As someone who identifies as a cultural minority in Australia, Nancy explained that her experiences whilst volunteering made her feel:

> *… like a different person. Especially with regards to my relationship with Australians, that has changed a lot for me, to be honest. Just on a personal level. As a coloured person living in Australia, you have a very different experience to white people. Living in [the host country] has made me realise that I actually don't need to put up with [some things] anymore … being back [in Australia], even though I've hardly left the house, the few interactions that I've had with people have made me want to move back overseas, basically. So I think that that has been a really valuable thing that's come out of this. On a personal level it's affected my relationships with Australians in general … just racism & cultural ignorance, cultural intolerance. I mean [the host country's] a very complex place. There's obviously racism there. But on a personal experience level in [the host country] I felt like I didn't stand out. Which was really lovely. People asked me where I was from & I said I was from Australia & they accepted that* (T2)

To reinforce this, Nancy recounted "*a very poignant moment at the Australia Day celebrations at the Australian Embassy*" during her assignment, at which:

> *… so many people asked me where I was from on that day. And they were all Australian. Once I said I'm from Australia they were like, 'Oh, but what else'. And so again I just had that feeling like, oh, I forgot that that's what it's like …. people aren't happy with that part of my identity. So I really enjoyed being in [the host country] where people were asking out of curiosity because you're a foreigner. It was nice to blend in (T2)*

These experiences made Nancy's "*outlook on life a lot different … I tell the story quite often now … how much more comfortable I felt being accepted as part of the community in [the host country]"* (T3). The experiences also informed & enriched a recent travel experience to a country where "*99.5% of the people look like me, it was incredible, you just feel completely anonymous which I don't think I'd ever really felt up until that time*" (T4). She reflected:

> *I've always been conscious of it, but I think that living in [the host country] for so long really solidified it & then coming back out & being like, 'Oh, wow I forgot that this is how it feels'. Yeah, [the host country] really helps shine a light on that … whether it's subconscious some days or really front of mind. I definitely know that I feel way more comfortable living overseas as a foreigner than I do living in Australia* (T4)

Nancy says the assignment "*really kick started my independence … how I shape my daily life now. That's a massive thing*" (T3). It also put her "*in a much better position mental health wise … that level of independence that I go from [the host country*]" (T3). Although Nancy believes that her cultural identity gave her volunteer experiences particular potency, she says:

> *What I've come to know is that that AusVol experience really made a lasting impact on everyone's lives that I'm in touch with & it has shaped & changed the ways in which I think that they go about life, even in terms of having a really solid friend group now or having more confidence to take an overseas position or travel more with work. Or on the flipside, it has shown them what was really important to them* (T4)

Nancy has achieved her pre-assignment goal to work abroad in a rights-based development role for an intergovernmental aid agency "*in a very similar role as what this [volunteer] position is*" (T1). During the pandemic, her volunteer experiences "*absolutely*" helped her find voluntary part-time work as an international development consultant *("that's what made me get a look in*", T3). It is also "*really important*" to her current role "*at a higher level*" (T4). She identified eight specific professional contacts that she formed through her volunteer assignment & that she currently uses in her work ("*the way that AusVol gets you to interact with the international development community in the country … that was really valuable … we all support each other professionally"*, T4).

As for the future, Nancy says that while "*COVID's made me stop thinking five years ahead … I don't really have intentions of living in Australia … I would much rather be overseas working in the field with partners … just having a home base overseas*" (T4).

At least six participants were equally adamant about the benefits and use of their cross-cultural experiences but were less precise in explaining how. One described the volunteer assignment as "*a good experience … I think everyone can benefit from that cross-cultural experience and to understand and live in another culture*", but struggled to "*pinpoint a specific thing that's impacted on me; [however] I think there's no doubt that those kinds of things are beneficial for people to get a broader perspective on things*" (#39). Another participant who works with and produced resources for communities that comprise large numbers of CALD members, noted that "*in general I've been a bit more understanding of people and having a bit more consideration of the different issues that would be impacting people's perspective*", noting that "*we put a lot of effort in to making sure that every event we do and every piece of work we produce is very culturally informed and diverse. So, I would say it comes into it in that way*" (#43). Another (#03) explained:

> *"Things waft through my mind. I'll be working, doing something and you do draw back from experiences. Not that you necessarily use those particular skills, but it puts things in perspective, I think … you're working with a bunch of people and situations arise and you can lean back on the experiences and think, well, it's not such a big deal because, this is how others live or how we dealt with situations. There's always that experience playing in your mind. So probably on, I don't know, a weekly basis even, I do this. Positive experiences.*

4.4 Global Networks with HCNs and Expatriates

Participants' ongoing contact with their POs is outlined in Section 3.3.1.

This section focuses on social connections that participants formed during their volunteer assignment with HCNs, including but not limited to former PO colleagues (Section 4.4.1), and their relationships with expatriate communities (Section 4.4.2). As the box on the right shows, these relationships with HCNs and expatriates are categorised as 'strong' or 'weak' connections[69] based on the frequency and depth of interaction.

A **social connection** is defined as an active interpersonal relationship between the participants and one or more HCN that exists through some form of direct contact (e.g., telephone, visits, social media). It excludes shared membership of social media groups.

Strong connections are defined by psychological proximity. They involve regular direct interpersonal conversations between the participant and one or more HCN via video, voice or text & the intention of the participant to maintain this.

Weak connections are those with an active connection (e.g., a shared social media platform) and with interactions that are less psychologically and resource intensive – i.e., largely episodic, occurring irregularly or only at special events (e.g., new year). "Moderate connections" – not reported here – are those that are more than episodic (e.g., occasional exchange of job opportunities or news updates) but irregular and generally of limited depth.

4.4.1 Relationships with Host-country Nationals

As **Table 5** shows, the number of participants retaining some connection with HCNs and strong connections with HCNs have both dissipated since T3.

Table 5: Participants' ongoing contact with host-country nationals

Contact with host-country nationals	T3 (2021), n = 54	T4 (2023), n = 50
Some contact with HCNs (weak or strong)	91%	74%
Strong ongoing contact with HCNs	41%	18%

Most of participants' connections with HCNs, and especially those classified as strong, are with former PO colleagues - reported by 48% of participants (53% of volunteers). A feature of this was the ongoing contact with large numbers of HCNs who were former colleagues but who have since left the PO and, in several cases, left the host country. In general, these interactions are occasional, declining in frequency, and sustained exclusively – with few exceptions – via social media. They are also the strongest connection participants have to the host country beyond the confines of the PO.

Young volunteers – especially *Launchers* and *Enhancers* who had strong host-country knowledge at T1 – are more likely to sustain HCN contact. Nine participants (18%) – mainly *Imposed Transitioners* and *Enhancers* - continue strong connections with specific HCNs.[70] These interactions are largely personal rather than professional, although a few revolve around ongoing work and civic projects or partnerships that participants established in-country (#09, #45) or subsequently (#01, #02, #19). Five participants identified new or strengthened relationships with HCNs as the biggest impact of their volunteer assignment to date.[71]

Of participants' relationships with former PO colleagues, the strongest and most valued are with former *counterparts* (i.e., PO employees who were designated counterparts who worked closely with the volunteer during the assignment). For these, where descriptions were provided by participants, the strongest ongoing volunteer-counterpart relationships tend to be anchored by personal similarity (e.g., gender, age category) and enabling conditions (e.g., shared language proficiency).

Other participants have sustained relationships with friends or business partners formed during the assignment, and/or former clients and professional contacts outside the PO. Participant #09, for example,

has partnered with two HCNs in an ongoing business specialising in host-country arts and crafts ("*we talk every day, all the time*", T4). Participants #41 and #45 continue to work closely with HCNs on separate voluntary projects that promote the interests of HCNs minorities in their respective host countries. Both have plans to return to the host country to advance these projects and relationships.

Connections with other HCNs – friends, neighbours, landlords - are less abundant and diminishing. Most are sustained by social media. The following responses are typical of these:

> *We connect on social media and occasionally they'll just send a quick message saying hi, but the language barrier's a little bit hard. But we are connected, we're connected on social media (#11)*

> *I'm still Instagram friends with some of them … I do reference those friendships often and say, oh I had a friend in [the host country] who thought this, or who said this, or we did this. So they definitely shape my world view in ways that I could probably struggle to articulate because it's so blurred with other aspects of my life. But unfortunately, not super close with anyone (#14)*

Of the seven participants who have returned to the host country as tourists or to work since T3, all except one contacted their former PO and one or more colleagues ("*I just didn't really have the energy for it, to be honest … we were there at a really awkward time over one of the sacred holidays*", #07). Some connections with HCNs have been strengthened by subsequent volunteer assignments (#17, #33).

Six participants (12%) continue to have some ongoing contact with the program's in-country management team (ICMT), down from eight at T3. Each was hosted in a different country. Most of this contact is personal, although some knowledge exchanges relating to work or volunteering assignments were reported. As the **box below** highlights, one volunteer who has subsequently returned to the host country to work is yet to make contact with the ICMT, despite believing that her experiences may be helpful to other volunteers.

Alumni volunteers who have returned to the host country – An untapped resource?

One volunteer established strong relationships with HCNs & expatriates in the host country during the assignment & has subsequently returned to the host country to live, arriving soon after COVID travel restrictions were lifted. Now based in the host-country capital, the volunteer has been surprised by **not** being approached by the program to assist or advise current volunteers – and believes other former volunteers in the host country feel likewise:

> *When I was volunteering I was happy as Larry, I had a very good support network with my social circle in [the host city]. But as an ex-volunteer now, I'm so confused about what [the program is] doing because I know that there's volunteers here in [the host country], new ones who've come in. The only reason I know is because I have connections with past volunteers … those people have reached out to me to say, 'There's another Australian coming on an AVI program to work for x organisation, can you help them out?' Of course, I'm always very happy to help & I know that's part of the alumni network. But what I don't understand is why AVI is aware that there's a few of us in […] who no longer are associated with AVI but are working in other things. Not one of us has ever been contacted by anyone in AVI … it sours the experience a little bit, cos you're like, 'I'm here, I'd be so happy to be involved, but none of you have ever made any effort'*

While some participants expressed interest in and/or attempts to contact HCN diaspora in Australia, the only participants reporting meaningful relationships were those with pre-assignment HCN contacts and/or strong pre-assignment understanding of the host country and its language/s. Efforts by a few others to engage with diaspora community networks in Australia via social media have been largely ineffective.

Thirteen participants (26%) – mainly older volunteers, over half of whom were *Veterans* or *Non-working partners* - report no ongoing contact with anyone from the host country.[72] Possessing few HCN friends during the assignment (#06, #07, #20) and disconnecting from social media (#12) were the main reasons given.

The **box below** summarises the six main factors associated with strong and ongoing connections between participants and HCNs across the three post-assignment interviews (T2-T4).

Predictors of strong connections with HCNs (T2-T4)

Six features of participants, their assignments & the host country have consistently shown to predict strong ongoing connections with HCNs since participants finished their assignments (T2-T4):

1. Volunteers working with a HCN counterpart in the PO during the assignment
2. Young volunteers (especially *Launchers* & *Enhancers*)
3. Volunteers with prior experiences in & a strong understanding of the host country
4. Volunteers' & HCNs' proficiency in a common language
5. Volunteer-HCN similarity (e.g., age group, gender, interests)
6. Accessibility & affordability of enabling technologies in the host country (Internet & mobile phone)

4.4.2 Relationships with Expatriate Communities

Outside their contact with other program volunteers (Section 6.5.1), expatriate communities within the host-country formed a strong part of the in-country social lives of many volunteers and *Non-working partners*, especially those whose assignments were in urban areas. They were also important sources of emotional and informational support, friendship, and professional camaraderie. One participant, who retains contact with an expatriate met in-country, made the point that:

> *On a personal level I miss that lifestyle where it's a small community and it's a lot of people who are really driven and care and are passionate about international community development. It's a bit hard to find that community here. Some of the positives of working in that space was being able to meet with people that have influence: embassies, the UN, the big players in international community development. It's so much harder to have access to that kind of dialogue [in Australia], it's very removed … I guess generally it's hard to find like-minded people … there was an openness to connect and get to know each other, and a social aspect as well as professionally* (#08, T4)

As with other groups, participants' connections with expatriates have generally atrophied since T3, although most continue in some form as weak connections. Illustrative of this trend are the extracts of interviews with two participants at **Attachment 7** – a *Non-working partner* and a *Transitioner*. The extracts taken from three waves of interviews (T2-T4) show the nature of contact among an expatriate community that formed in-country. Other typical descriptions of this change at T4 are:

- "*I haven't spoken to […] for a while. Other than the occasional Happy Birthday message on Facebook that's perhaps the extent of the engagement there*" (#52)
- *"It runs hot and cold, but everyone has busy lives and we will catch up every now and again and hear what each other is doing"* (#54)
- "*Still in contact but less so. They're busy now … from time to time we circulate messages to see what everyone's up to*" (#40)

Just 13 participants (26%) continue to nurture and benefit personally or professionally from regular contact with expatriate networks,[73] although the frequency of this contact does vary. Seven of these are strong connections[74]; six others reported dramatically decreased contact with expatriates or expatriate groups that they had previously considered close contacts at T3.[75] Ten participants report no ongoing connection with either expatriate or HCN communities from their volunteer assignment.[76]

The expatriates forming these networks – mainly European or North American - are divided equally among embassy staff, former PO colleagues (primarily INGOs and intergovernmental agencies), and friends (including volunteers from other national programs). Some remain in the host country although most now reside elsewhere. Several work in international development or the participants' professional domain. Participant #54 attended the wedding of one expatriate in the host country who had provided a job reference and who, as a professional:

> *I felt very engaged and very embedded in that international [professional domain] more broadly, and so that did frame a lot of our conversations [during the assignment] and a lot of deeper thinking that I have done since returning home*

"Some have become best friends. […] is Canadian, she's currently in Argentina but we talk every day. Same with a colleague that I met in [the host country]. He is in Germany now, we talk every other day … it's definitely social but then we also have the career element I think as well. If they're going for a job, we'll send them jobs or if they're going through a tricky part of their career or something we'll talk about that. I think because we're career-minded in the same way" (#37, T4)

"I've been in contact with most of my old team at the [PO] … even though I wouldn't say necessarily that those relationships gave any tangible benefits, I consider them friends and I just like following their life and seeing what they're doing. Like […] is having a baby and I think they became friends and just, I just follow them and just like tic tac … they're still good friends and I'm so proud that […] is doing his doctorate and […] is having baby number two. […] is going just up and up … he's now he's moved on to [a different country] which is a bigger office with much more regional coordination. I'm so proud of them" (#53, T4)

Predictors of strong connections between participants & expatriate communities (T2-T4)

Four features of participants & their assignments are most consistently related to strong and/or ongoing connections with expatriate networks since participants finished their assignments (T2-T4):

1. Volunteers based in a capital city in the host country during the assignment
2. Younger volunteers (especially *Launchers*, *Enhancers* and *Transitioners*)
3. Volunteers working in internationally-staffed POs (intergovernmental agencies and INGOs)
4. A shared professional interest between the volunteer and the expatriate/s

4.5 Global Literacy and Connections: Key Findings and Emerging Implications

4.5.1 Key Findings

- Although participants' cognitive engagement and connections with people from the host-country have declined since their assignments were completed, most remain more interested in, more closely connected to, and more favourably disposed towards the country hosting their assignments than they were at T1. These interests, connections and feelings appear authentic and lasting. For some participants, they have been life changing.
- In general, young volunteers retain higher levels of host-country engagement and connections than others. Social media feeds from groups or individuals are the main information source. Limited information from the host country, and participants' competing personal and professional commitments – including work focusing on other countries – are the main reasons given for declining engagement.
- Participants' development of cross-cultural proficiencies has been one of the strongest and most valued impacts of their involvement with the program. The development of "culture-general knowledge and capabilities" (e.g., behavioural flexibility and global mindset) is generally regarded as the most transformational and most transferrable to participants' work and life (also see Section 5.3.1). Over three quarters report using cross-cultural proficiencies developed during the assignment in their work (mainly young volunteers) or voluntary service (mainly old volunteers).
- Participants continue to view their volunteer assignments as important mechanisms contributing to a richer, more nuanced and generally positive understanding of the host country. This includes most participants who were already familiar with the host culture and its language before their assignment (T1).
- Just a quarter of participants continue to nurture and benefit personally or professionally from regular contact with expatriate networks established during the volunteer assignment. These expatriates include embassy staff, former PO colleagues, and volunteers from other national programs, and are now globally dispersed.
- Participants' lives continue to be global in attitudes and capabilities, and to a lesser extent behaviours. For many these appear to be increasingly so despite the constraints imposed by their repatriations and subsequent travel restrictions for some of the current period. These continue despite the generally declining intensity of contact between participants and international contexts (host country and elsewhere), including work (see Section 5.2). In other words, the volunteer assignment has been successful in further globalising participants' minds, capabilities and relationships.
- Viewed holistically, despite declines in host-country engagement and connections since T3, three years after the participants' assignments ended, their involvement with the program has contributed to deeper "cultural understanding from living and working in a community overseas."[77] Arguably the most impactful element of this is the ongoing evolution and use of cross-cultural proficiencies that continue to inform participants' outlook, work and lives.

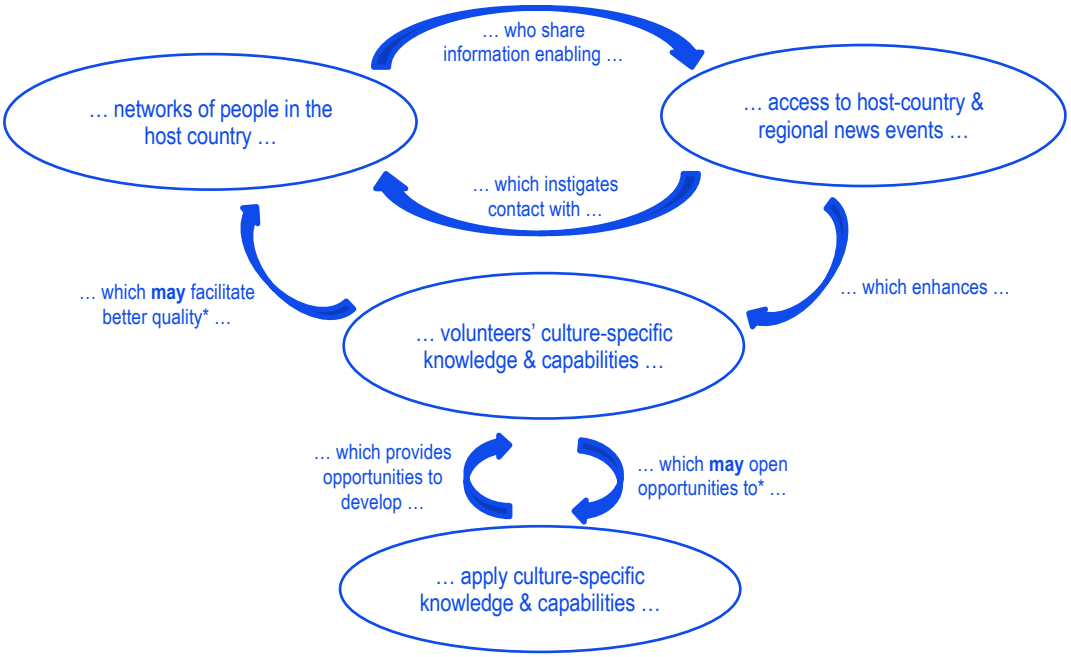
4.5.2 Emerging Implications

» Strengthening Volunteers' Host-country Engagement, Connections and Knowledge

Increasingly clear from the study's results to date is that personal, contextual and structural features contribute to volunteers' engagement, connections and understanding of the host country. The latter include the program's theory of change and support mechanisms that provide the cultural foundations, deep cultural immersion, person-to-person work contact, and ongoing cultural support for volunteers before and during their assignment.

Within this structure, the findings across T3 and T4 present convincing evidence of an interdependence between volunteers' host-country knowledge and capabilities, their connections with HCNs and others in the host country, and their engagement with the host country (Section 4.2 and 4.3). Although a multitude of factors appear to shape these, the tentative model depicted in **Figure 8** seeks to illustrates the study's finding that volunteers' host-country personal contacts (top left) and host-country engagement (top right) can be mutually supportive and can contribute to and benefit from volunteers possessing and applying culture-specific knowledge and capabilities (centre and bottom). Importantly, in the current study these relationships appear to continue even when volunteers are outside the host-country and their connections and engagement largely from a distance (T3-T4).

Figure 8: Understanding the relationship between host-country connections, engagement, and knowledge/capabilities (a tentative model)



The model is supported by data from T4 and prior interviews[78] but is tentative and should be revisited after the study's T5 interviews, including feedback from LSAV participants about the relationships it presents. Moreover, the current study offers no evidence for the two relationships indicated with asterisks, which are supported empirically by other research, but which fall outside the scope of the LSAV study.[79] Nonetheless, the model may provide a helpful framework for understanding the chief ways that the program does and could contribute to strengthening these relationships– e.g., through structured VPLJ activities before, during or after a volunteer assignment that support one or more of the model's four main variables. For instance, the model (and T4 findings) suggests that the targeted sharing by ICMTs of news/events with alumni volunteers – such as events in POs, or national political or cultural issues from host countries (Section 4.2) – may prompt volunteers to contact HCNs and, in doing so, refine their host-country knowledge resources. Likewise, the model reveals the wider range of impacts that arise from ICOPs beyond helping volunteers to enjoy, cope and succeed during their assignments – namely, by providing the foundational knowledge upon which their post-assignment engagement, connections and application of these capabilities are built.

» Helping Volunteers Develop a Global Outlook

Three waves of data since participants' assignments ended have made clear that the volunteer assignments' contributions to "culture-general knowledge and capabilities" are among the most impactful and most easily transferable of all outcomes (T2-T4) – see also Section 5.3.1 and 6.3.

Many of the learning outcomes reported at T3 and T4 – especially although not exclusively those relating to "culture-general knowledge and capabilities" – highlight both the strength and benefits of volunteers' capacity to engage with their volunteer experience reflectively. This reflective practice[80] is an important mechanism to assist volunteers make sense of their volunteer experiences (during and after their assignments), and potentially as a mechanism to prepare volunteers for learning opportunities, including transformational changes, prior to deployment.[81]

A variety of techniques can be used to support self-reflection in individuals and groups.[82] One of these is sharing and discussing detailed personal accounts of the impacts of the volunteer experience, like the 'Volunteer stories' included in this report. For example, while the 13 'Volunteer stories' in this report were written to illustrate key themes, these or similar narratives can be the basis for knowledge and capabilities to be discussed more explicitly or for reflection to be foregrounded. Although these 13 examples are selective and truncated accounts, these types of narratives are important representations of different versions of what life looks like after volunteering and how volunteers' cross-cultural experiences continue to have impacts on them and/or others. The cases of Bronwen (Section 4.3.1) and Nancy (Section 4.3.2) are visceral exemplars of this. Similar cases describing volunteers applying their cross-cultural acumen in different *domestic* settings – like the case of Melissa in Section 5.3.1 - may be beneficial for volunteers not seeking international work. This is pertinent for several participants who underwent changes in their international aspirations, largely due to their repatriations and the COVID pandemic (Section 5.2).

It is also clear that volunteers' emotional attachments to the host country and its people remain strong for most volunteers well after their assignment finishes. One manifestation of this attachment - evident through the study's processes rather than dataset – was the emotional resonance created in some interviews by artefacts and objects (including animals) from the host country (see 'The pet connection: Artefacts and animals as reminders of the volunteer assignment', page 29). Artefacts and objects such as photographs, work tools, or souvenirs can create emotional connections to both place and experience. These items are also recognised as critical building blocks of learning[83] and, through interacting with them, important mechanisms for sensemaking.[84] They thus offer the potential to be powerful cues to assist volunteers recall and reflect on learning experiences, invoking different memories than might be accessible via simple reflection, especially to access emotions and stories. In this, we see potential for the program to consider using meaningful artefacts and objects from volunteers' experiences as devices to facilitate reflection - on both learning and associated emotional aspects of an experience - and/or to seed the sharing of experiences with others. We address the use and application of other reflective practices when discussing volunteers' personal changes (Section 6.6.2).

» Supporting Volunteers' Global Connections

The declining frequency of engagement and contact with host countries and HCNs likely reflect a combination of legitimate declines in interest over time and the realities of participants' current lives, especially with so many changes stemming from their repatriation and subsequent activities (including professional attachments to other countries or new employers).

Notwithstanding the value of regular engagement and communication, and the role of social media in supporting this, some of the most beneficial relationships that volunteers develop appear to transcend the number of connections or counts on the frequency of contacts. The richness, quality and the longevity of some relationships – evident in several of the 'Volunteer stories' throughout this report – are important. Similarly, as Sections 3.3.2 and 3.6 show, relatively "weak ties" that are sustained through irregular social media exchanges can result in congeniality and support that is valued without being overwhelming.

Given this, while the program's objective of "stronger connections" likely incorporates a variety of manifestations, consideration should be given to clarifying and sharing what constitutes 'success' to ensure that the full value and impact of relatively weak but valuable connections with HCNs are acknowledged.

The current results offer further support for our suggestions at T3 that the program continue to create opportunities to help volunteers establish and sustain a balanced and complementary set of social and professional relationships arising from their assignments that includes volunteers, HCNs, and others.[85] One example of this is the program's use of accessible alumni volunteers to support in-country or in-coming volunteers, for mutual benefit.[86] Organising frameworks like the 'Volunteer stories' in this report or the model at **Figure 8** may help these discussions by allowing volunteers to reflect on their experience and to model that reflection when talking about their experiences.

5 Career Progression and Professional Capabilities

5.1 Overview and Background

This section reports outcomes relating to participants' career progression and professional capabilities. As well as addressing the program's objective to support volunteers to "gain professionally", the outcomes discussed in this section are central to the motivations that many LSAV participants gave for volunteering[87] (and to the motivations of many program volunteers).[88] The section addresses the impact of participation in the program on:

1. **Participants' employment status and career progression** (Section 5.2). Sub-sections are devoted to examining the impacts to date on participants' career trajectory (5.2.1), on participants whose pre-assignment motivations were attached to a transition to a prosocial career (5.2.2), and on participants' professional networks (5.2.3); and
2. **Participants' professional knowledge and capabilities** (Section 5.3). This includes separate sections on the ways participants have developed and been utilising these since their assignment (5.3.1), and on the relationship between volunteering and formal education that participants have undertaken (5.3.2).

The section ends by distilling the core findings and considering some emerging implications for volunteer support and management (Section 5.4).

Background: Summary of participants' professional status and capabilities (T1-T3)

Participants came from a mix of professional fields & career stages. They were highly qualified - 95% holding either a Bachelor (45%) or Master's/Doctorate degree (49%), with professional experience varying from nil to 41 years (mean: 15 years) and most working full-time (40%) or retirees (28%). Others had just completed full-time studies (10%) or were unemployed and seeking work (22%). At T1, 52% expressed an aim or a general interest to pivot their career (job, employer or sector) toward one that had stronger prosocial features (i.e. help others and produce beneficial social/environmental impacts), while 22 (44%) – especially *Transitioners* and *Launchers* - reported future career plans that were internationally oriented. Twenty-nine participants (58%) identified career benefits as an important motivation for volunteering.

The forced repatriations of most participants due to COVID & subsequent labour market disruptions & travel restrictions had major influences on participants' careers, especially those seeking international work and/or those with no work to which they could return in Australia. Nonetheless, by twelve months after their volunteer assignment (T3), 37% of participants had achieved objective career benefits from their assignment even if they had not expected this, and most who were seeking work had found employment. Nearly half of those who were pursuing careers (18/38, excluding non-working participants) had achieved positive career benefits from their assignment, including 8/13 who had identified "career" as their primary motivation for volunteering.

Moreover, a large proportion of participants who entered the program seeking to pivot to a more "prosocial" careers had achieved this by T3, having found a new position, organisation or sector that (participants believed) allowed them to make a more positive social/environmental impacts.

Nonetheless, by T3 36% of participants found the assignment had been detrimental to their career or had not been beneficial despite their expectations that it would be. Six experienced "career setbacks", including two whose primary motivation for entering the program was "career". One in three participants who had found work at T3 were in a 'plan B' job unrelated to their preferred profession. Moreover, 16 of the prosocial career seekers had not, by T3, achieved the desired transition & thus not yet fulfilled one of their main objectives for volunteering.

The volunteer assignments' novelty, variety & changeable nature offered great scope for participants to develop professional knowledge & capabilities, especially their interpersonal & "soft skills", but also career priorities/direction. Almost all participants who found post-assignment employment identified ways that they had used some new professional knowledge or capabilities within the first year of completing their assignment. A quarter of volunteers were also inspired to instigate a program of formal education to further a professional opportunity or to consolidate or build on an insight or interest that arose during their assignment.

5.2 Employment Status and Career Progression

Using objective indicators of employment and participants' evaluations of their current career goals and status, the data show an overall improvement in the sample's career status since T3. It is also generally favourable when compared to earlier phases, including their pre-assignment careers. That is, **when compared to earlier waves of data, at T4 a larger proportion of participants who want to work are working, are working in their chosen professional field, and are working in roles that provide satisfaction or meaning**.[89]

Table 6 summarises participants' employment status prior to their volunteer assignment (T1) and at two points after their assignment: (i) 12 months after competing their assignments, at a time when work and travel were still restricted by the remnants of COVID (2021, T3), and (ii) approximately three years after completing their assignment (2023, T4). It includes only participants for whom full datasets are available (n = 50).

The table shows generally positive changes in participants employment status and a decline in unemployment. The proportion of participants working full-time in their chosen professional career has risen.

Table 6: Participants' employment status (T1-T4)

Employment status	T1 (2019) n (%)	T3 (2021) n (%)	T4 (2023) n (%)	Notes[1]
Employed (full-time)[2]	**20 (40)**	**23 (46)**	**32 (64)**	The number of participants working internationally has decreased from seven (T1) to five (T4). The latter includes three former retirees now working on in-country assignments. An additional five participants work domestically in roles in overtly international/global contexts. The number of participants working in roles outside their main professional interest (i.e., 'plan B' careers) has declined from five at T3 to one at T4.[90] Five participants now working full-time were unemployed and seeking work at T1. Two participants who had pre-arranged jobs to return to in Australia at the completion of their assignment (T1) are employed with the same organisation at T4.
Employed (part-time)	**0 (0)**	**5 (10)**	**5 (10)**	Just one participant working part-time at T4 (an *Enhancer* working multiple part-time roles) is seeking full-time work, down from four at T3.[91] Two are in semi-retirement. One is working abroad. Two others have overtly international/global contexts to their work.
Student (full-time)	**5 (10)**	**1 (2)**	**2 (4)**	Both full-time students (T4) were inspired to study by their volunteer assignment. One works part-time. An additional participant is studying a doctorate degree part-time (whilst working full-time). All prior full-time students (five at T1 and one at T3) now work in their chosen careers (four full-time, one part-time).
Unemployed (seeking work)	**11 (22)**	**6 (12)**	**1 (2)**	None of the participants who were unemployed and seeking work at T1 or T3 remain unemployed at T4; all have transitioned to work, study or retirement. The sole unemployed participant at T4 has recently returned from international voluntary service after resigning from a full-time professional role.
Not working (retired)	**14 (28)**	**15 (30)**	**10 (20)**	Six retirees have re-entered full-time work since T3. Three of these are undertaking in-country international volunteer assignments. One *Imposed Transitioner* (T1) has now retired.

[1] Table includes data from 50 participants for whom T1-T4 data is available.

[2] Includes participants working full-time on formal volunteer assignments.

At T1, 13 participants expressed individual "career" benefits as their primary motivation for entering the program. Ten of these now work full-time (T4). Of the remaining three, one is now based in Asia working part-time with an intergovernmental agency (and doing additional consulting) using expertise accumulated during the assignment (#37), one has retired from paid work by choice, having completed a subsequent hybrid volunteer assignment with the program, and is awaiting another in-country placement with an intergovernmental agency that builds directly on the assignment experiences (#40), and one studies full-time on a degree that was inspired by the volunteer assignment (#12).

Seventeen additional participants identified "career" as a subsidiary (second or third) but not primary motivation. At T4, 16 of these are working in their chosen profession/career (one has retired due to a combination of limited work opportunities and personal/family obligations).

Of the 22 participants seeking international careers at T1, just two now work overseas in their chosen career (#27, #37), five work in Australia in overtly international/global contexts (#07, #14, #19, #29, #39) while one (#40) has retired from paid work and is completing in-country volunteer assignment/s.[92] Three additional participants - *Veterans* completing international volunteer assignments - also work abroad.

5.2.1 Impact on Career Trajectory

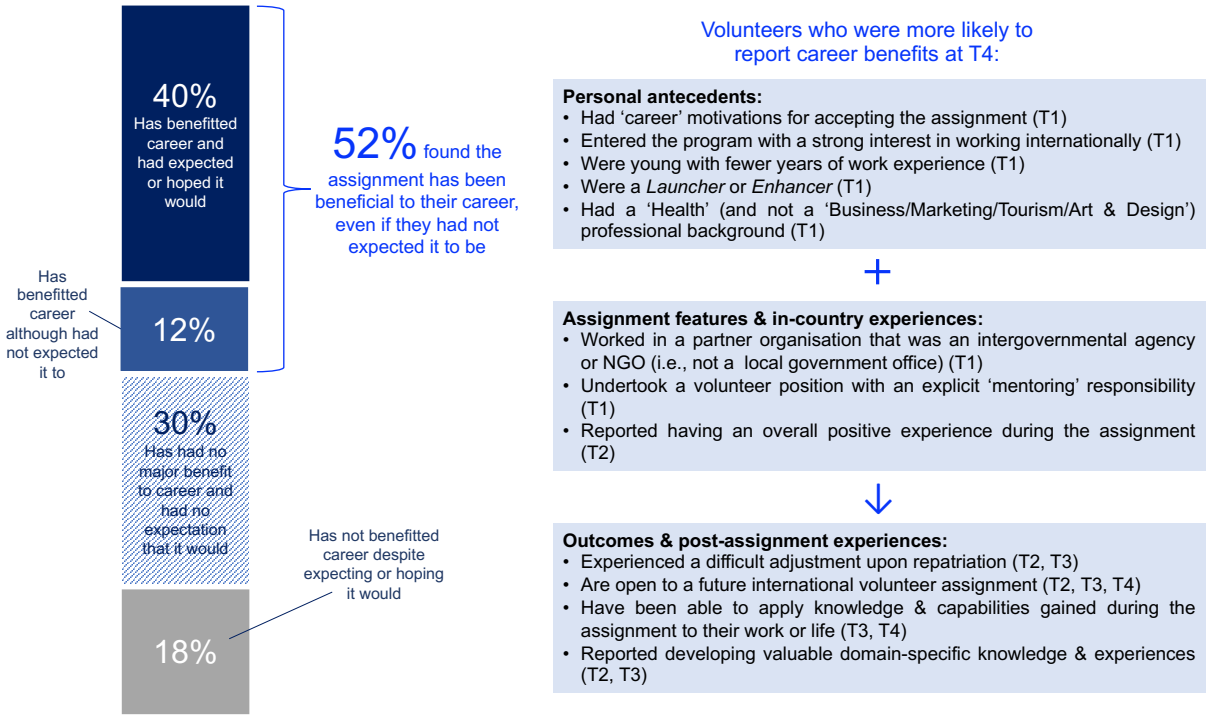
Some participants are convinced of the positive influence their volunteer assignment had on their careers ("*enormous*", #53, "*there's no overstating it*", #02) and were able to articulate detailed specific benefits and impacts during interviews. Six participants – all young *Launchers*, *Enhancers* or *Transitioners* - identified career benefits as the single biggest impact of their volunteer assignment to date.[93] Others, in contrast, found it more difficult to attribute career impacts to their volunteer assignment at T4 than they had at T3. The sentiments expressed by the three participants in the box on the right capture some sense of what others felt about attributing career outcomes to their times as volunteers.

For these reasons, analysing the impacts of participants' involvement with program on their careers combined data on participants': (i) stated pre-assignment objectives and motivations (T1), (ii) current employment status relative to T1, (iii) descriptions of the use of assignment experiences, knowledge, capabilities or networks in their current work/career (including job or promotion applications) (T3-T4), and (iv) overall evaluation about whether and how their present employment and/or professional status was affected by their involvement in the program (T4). Significant events that participants linked clearly to their assignment were given greater weight.

- "It's really hard to disentangle … how much relates to my time in […] & how much is other factors. I certainly feel it has helped … [but] can I be sure?" (#19)
- "I think in a trickle effect I [was offered my current job] in some ways because of my time in [the host country], but in some ways a lot not" (#14)
- "I think it had an influence. [but] I don't know how big an influence it had" (#54)

The results of this analysis for all 50 participants are presented in the bar chart at the left of **Figure 9**. It shows that over half the sample (26, 52%) found their assignment beneficial to their career, even if they had not expected it to be.[94] Eighteen of these experienced and reported unambiguously positive career benefits (36%), while the benefit for eight participants was more equivocal (e.g., clarifying the direction of a career or benefitting professional capabilities without clear career progression).[95] **Excluding the 10 retired participants, two thirds of participants have experienced "career gains" from their assignment to date.**

Figure 9: Impact of volunteering on participants' career



The right of **Figure 9** identifies the personal antecedents, the assignment features and in-country experiences, and the outcomes and post-assignment experiences that are associated with participants reporting more favourable career impacts at T4.

In general, the types of in-country experiences and to a lesser extent personal antecedents are consistent with results at T3, suggesting some reliability in the factors that appear to contribute to volunteers' career benefits, despite the major impacts of the COVID pandemic. In general, participants who entered the program with career objectives (T1) have benefitted objectively and subjectively. Those seeking international careers have also benefitted, even though few have realised their ambition to work outside Australia (see the box '**How COVID disrupted careers & altered international objectives**' on the next page).

Nine participants (18%) expected or hoped at T1 that their involvement with the program would help their career but have yet to realise a tangible benefit (T2-T4). These come from four volunteer types, mainly *Transitioners* and *Imposed Transitioners* (three each).[96] For three of these, the primary impediment to achieving their pre-assignment objectives was the enforced repatriation (COVID). For the other six, the impacts of COVID were also evident, although other reasons for their assignments being less developmental than expected centre mainly on the lack of 'fit' between them, the volunteer role and the PO environment (e.g., a role that did not fit the volunteers' expertise or interests, lack of PO support for the volunteer or role, an isolated or stressful PO and/or non-work context). Four of these six ended, or seriously considered ending, their assignment prematurely (T2).

How COVID disrupted careers & altered international objectives

The consequences of the COVID pandemic for mobility, labour markets & economic activity had major influences on the participants' objective careers & career plans in the years following their assignments.

The majority of the sample had left full-time paid employment prior to their assignment & had no work role or employer to which they could return when their assignments were prematurely ended in 2020. As outlined in Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers 2019-2021: Final Report (April 2022), several participants spent long periods unemployed, working part-time, and/or working in lower paying roles or roles outside their preferred professional area (T2-T3). This remains the case for two participants at T4, three years after their repatriation. Other participants accepted roles with international dimensions after their repatriations despite these being "*a step backwards*" because they saw the context of this work as beneficial to their long-term career aspirations to work abroad (post-COVID). The decision about where to repatriate was also salient, with some participants relocating to new or rural areas for "*lifestyle*" (#26) or "*family*" (#24) reasons that have limited their career opportunities.

Just two of the 22 participants with international career aspirations at T1 are now working abroad (T4). This is despite many having experiences that created opportunities, networks and capabilities conducive to further international work. While some of these 22 now hold roles with an explicit international or global focus, several who were forced to seek domestic work in the shadow of COVID have now found secure and/or meaningful work in a domestic context, sometimes in a different sector (e.g., #07, #08, #09, #24, #35, #45). For most of these participants, their international career aspirations have been consciously curtailed or delayed, with some – like participant #52 - now more cautious about planning international careers:

> *I'm reluctant to tell you [about my future] because I think I've had a plan before & that all went out the window. So I'm just literally taking it day-by-day at the moment. I'm trying to find things that align to my professional & personal interests & fill my life with that. I can't tell you which direction it goes because I had a direction in mind with [the host country] & then it went out the window. But I can tell you what I will be trying to do is just filling my life full of people & experiences that align with my passions & interests & if I do that well, then I think I'll be in a place in five years where I'm happy & content* (#52, T4)

For others, despite some ongoing interest in working abroad, the return to Australia & extended interruptions provoked by COVID appear to have restricted opportunities for future international work by adding new responsibilities, relationships, interests or financial insecurities to the decision equation:

- *I would love to [work abroad again]. I think with having a mortgage now & having animals & things like that, that does make it more difficult* (#35)
- *I would love to return back to international work in that […] space, but I also really love that frontline work & unfortunately most roles internationally aren't frontline workers* (#08)
- *I'd love to go over there, but, no, I've got responsibility here* (#03)

In short, while their experiences on the program have globalised many participants' mindset and networks (Sections 4.4 and 4.5), the circumstances of their return have dampened interest in or opportunities for some nascent global careers.

5.2.2 Prosocial Career Transitions

Phases One and Two of this study revealed numerous participants whose careers had strong "prosocial" orientations when entering the program.

At T1, 18 participants[97] from five different volunteer types were unambiguous about seeking **both**: (i) career benefits from their volunteer assignment (i.e., career motivations), **and** (ii) to use their assignment to transition in some way to a career that had a stronger "prosocial" orientation[98] (see box). An additional nine[99] had career motivations and expressed broad interest in future work being more prosocial, although had less clearly defined pathways to transition and so were using the assignment to explore the viability of a possible shift. Jointly, these 27 participants comprised a cross-cutting group of "**prosocial career seekers**" entering the program at T1 (2019). This group comprised 52% of all participants across all volunteer groups except *Veterans* and *Non-working Partners* at T1.

A **prosocial career** is one motivated, at least in part, by a desire to help others and produce beneficial social or environmental impacts.

A **prosocial career transition** is one where a participant's motivations for transitioning employment to a new position, organisation or sector is, at least in part, to better help others and to provide more beneficial social/environmental impacts. In these cases, the participant perceives that their new role, employer and/or sector will help them contribute to (more) beneficial outcomes. Examples from this study include volunteers wanting to work in a role, organisation or sector that addresses sustainability, human rights, humanitarian aid or international development issues.

Table 7 shows the number of prosocial career seekers for each type of volunteer who have been able to achieve a transition by 2021 (T3) and 2023 (T4). It includes only participants for whom full datasets are available (n = 50). As the table shows, 11 prosocial career seekers (41%) had achieved a prosocial career transition at T3.[100] By T4, this figure had risen to 17 (63%).[101] These participants came from four volunteer types, mostly *Imposed Transitioners* and *Enhancers*.[102]

When compared to other participants, the 17 prosocial career transitioners are more likely to be female, assigned to a domestic NGO (PO) and not to a government department, be unaccompanied during the assignments, and believe that the assignment benefitted their career. They are also less likely to express interest in remote volunteer assignments.

Table 7: Participants seeking and achieving prosocial career transitions by volunteer type

Volunteer type (total number per group)	Number seeking at T1 (2019)	Number achieved at T3 (2021)	Number achieved at T4 (2021)	Participants who achieved a transition by T4
Launchers n = 6 	**6**	**3 (50%)**	**3 (50%)**	Participants #27, #37 and #46
Enhancers n = 7 	**7**	**3 (43%)**	**5 (71%)**	Participants #02, #09, #14, #45 and #53
Career Breakers n = 3 	**1**	**0 (0%)**	**0 (0%)**	-
Transitioners n = 12 	**9**	**2 (22%)**	**6 (67%)**	Participants #04, #07, #08, #29, #35 and #54
Imposed Transitioners n = 7 	**4**	**3 (75%)**	**3 (75%)**	Participants #23, #28 and #40
Total	**27**	**11 (41%)**	**17 (63%)**	

Table includes data from 50 participants for whom T1-T4 data is available

As the table shows, four *Transitioners* and two *Enhancers* have succeeded in transitioning to prosocial careers since T3. Upon repatriation, some had accepted 'plan B' jobs in local or state government. Since then, some have taken opportunities for promotion or new roles that build, in part, on their volunteer experiences; like participant # 29, who after the repatriation "*just took what was available … there wasn't that much available … then I took a further step down to come into the organisation just for an international role*" (T4) and was later selected for a short-term international deployment that "*picked up some of that experience working in [the host country] … part of the case I could put forward [for being selected] was my experience doing capacity building work in […] that helped and has built my credibility to do that role*" (T4).

» Main Reasons for Participants Not Achieving a Prosocial Transition

Importantly, not all 10 prosocial career seekers[103] who failed to achieve a desired prosocial transition by T4 have been left unfulfilled by their assignments. All ten now work full-time (T4), seven are classified as having volunteer assignments which were generally beneficial for their career at T4.

Of note, all ten volunteers who did not achieve a desired prosocial career change had reported (at T2) a PD that was inaccurate (i.e., differed in substantial ways from their pre-assignment expectations).

For some of these, the assignment provided insight that caused participants to reconsider their initial plans to seek careers in international development (e.g., #11, #20, #30). Others hope to return to the sector in the near future. For instance, since being repatriated, participant #19 used contacts developed on the assignment to return to the host country and complete a contract with an INGO. He hopes to do so again, but is now using his host-country expertise – enhanced during the volunteer assignment - in a well-paid local role and contemplating taking on his first mortgage ("*I didn't think that [my current role] was meant to be my [career] path … I just assumed that I'd continue on working for small NGOs and stuff like that in aid and development, but at the moment this is certainly where I'm at*").

Others returned from their assignments to changed family circumstances that required them to live and find employment locally (#01, #24). For at least three participants (#19, #29, #52), heightened financial insecurity – amplified for many people during COVID[104] and in two cases linked directly to volunteering – led to different career trajectories ("*In some ways I think the timing of the pandemic on the assignment has probably left me in a more precarious situation than I possibly would otherwise be without the volunteer assignment*", #29).

Despite not working in overtly prosocial roles, organisations or sectors, this group retains an ongoing interest in prosocial outcomes. This was true of **Bettina**, whose case study shows a shift in focus away from international aid and development to a sector where, she believes, she can "*work in a context that isn't necessarily in social advocacy or whatnot but I can still make a difference*" (T4). Others expressed similar sentiments, like participant #03 who noted:

> *I guess I want to do more altruistic sort of work. I'm not interested in becoming a CEO or looking for big dollars or anything like that. I'd much rather work for an organisation for free, say, if there's something meaningful and I feel I'm putting my best foot forward and people are getting something out of it* (T4)

Volunteer stories: Bettina – From human rights to student rights

Before entering the program, Bettina had limited full-time work experience but had volunteered in social advocacy during school & university. At T1 she expressed a desire to "*get my foot in the door*" working in international human rights (T1) by:

> *… gain(ing) experience in a different environment, different culture, so that I could really build up my experience there … because human rights is an area that I do want to continue working with. Organisations that do uphold those values are organisations that I want to work with. Also being able to build up that network & understanding of how it all works & being able to work there … I also get to see how human rights works* (T1)

Reflecting on her volunteer assignment with an intergovernmental agency, Bettina felt that "*I didn't get as much out of it as I wanted to*" (T4), although "*it was really easy to connect with other organisations, other groups. I feel like I benefitted a lot from going to meetings, external offices outside my [PO]*" & from "*working in an international office … a greater understanding of other people & other people's backgrounds*" (T2).

Bettina expressed reservations about her time working with in a "*high level*" PO that, she felt, "*was paying lip service or just spreading the message from [the PO's] headquarters about certain activities … it was a waste of resources … we were in a position where you're posting something on social media, it's not actively hurting anyone, it's just a waste of time & resources*"" (T2). She felt that "*working there was very different to actually studying it … it was much more business-oriented than I thought it would be … I don't think [the PO] respected differences between cultures very much … I definitely felt bit uneasy about that* " (T4).

Bettina felt that her volunteer experience "*has given me a bit more direction in terms of what I want my eventual job to be … I was able to see how much more effective working in policy or NGOs is in comparison to working within bureaucratic systems*" (T3). She also spent time "*talking to other people & learning about their career paths*" (T3). Even though she "*went into the program wanting to work a lot with international aid & development*" she saw "*the complexities associated with working at international levels in a completely foreign environment*" (T3). One project she worked on during her assignment, in particular, "*was a really big part of my experience over there*" (T3). Unlike most of her work, this project involved:

> *… working directly with other [education-focused] NGOs … on the ground, it was much more effective to be working there … you need that practical on-the-ground knowledge … I guess it's what you call the frontlines & social advocacy, from what I've seen [it] is the most effective way to really create the change that needs to be made … creating solutions at a very low level are much more effective* (T3)

Bettina had a personally challenging repatriation & COVID lockdown. She applied for several jobs that would build on her volunteering experiences, without luck ("*research institutes, think tanks, councils, youth organisations … advocacy groups*", T3) even though the intercultural experiences she gained from her culturally diverse PO & "*being able to bring that back to Australia … was a big plus*" (T3). She worked temporarily in a backup job to earn a salary during COVID (T3) & enrolled in a postgraduate degree focusing on skills that would help her provide frontline services to people in need, a decision that was "*definitely*" influenced by her work on the project.

Bettina continues her studies part-time ("*it was a good choice in terms of what I want to do … there have been a couple of projects that I've been able to lean into the skills I developed & drawing on the knowledge I used [whilst volunteering] in specific projects*", T4). She has also found a permanent role in education policy that draws on her volunteering experiences ("*it was really important, having that experience overseas … I definitely talked about it a lot [during the job interview*]", T4), but which allows her to use her policy & project skills.

Although Bettina's role involves *"very basic admin level work … quite different to what I was doing [during the volunteer assignment]" (T4),* it is a good place to "*build up my skills & knowledge & be able to sit still for a little while … get cats & settle down for a little bit*" (T4). She believes the volunteer assignment:

> *… definitely helped my professional life … really confirm where I wanted to go in professional terms … I do actually think I've had a shift towards what I want to do since I've gotten back. One thing I learnt about social advocacy … is that it's very tiring, very tiring … half the time you're fighting your own people, just fighting people within your own organisation or another organisation that's doing similar thing & they don't want you treading on their toes. Actually, for a couple of years now I've been wanting to work in [education]. That way I do get to use some international experience, but I also do get to use my policy experience as well (*T4)

5.2.3 Professional Networks

Sections 4.4.1 and 4.4.2 summarise participants' ongoing relationships with host-country and expatriate communities. Section 6.5 focuses on personal relationships, including those with other volunteers. This section addresses the career impacts of professional relationships established through the program.

At T4, 13 volunteers (26%) reported having accrued benefits over the past two years from professional networks that they established through their involvement with the program.[105] Participants also reported receiving indirect benefits (e.g., through referees in job applications - #06, #24, #53) or nurturing professional contacts that have yet to lead to an exchange of specific benefits. Several had lost contact with professional networks since T3 due to staff turnover in the PO (#20), changing sector/career (#31), or their decision to disconnect from social media (#43).

The professional networks that participants retain comprise expatriates, Australians and HCNs,[106] most of whom work in the same or an adjacent professional field as the participant – most frequently international development, health, and government. These networks have resulted in international partnerships between POs and participants' current organisations (e.g., formal and informal skills exchanges), projects (e.g., research, educational, IT), employment offers, and consulting opportunities.

Participants reporting tangible benefits were spread across four of the five volunteer types for whom career was a substantive motivation at T1 (*Launchers*, *Enhancers*, *Transitioners*, *Imposed Transitioners*). Most were hosted by domestic or international NGOs in urban areas in East Asia and the Asian Archipelago.

All but one of the participants benefitting at T4 also reported benefits at T3, suggesting that many of those relationships offering benefits soon after volunteers' return have continued to be helpful. For six of these, the benefits were substantial.[107] The **case study of Bronwen** (page 32) is perhaps the strongest - albeit an atypical - example of the influence of these networks. Other examples include:

- **Participant #19,** who works in an Australia government role and is involved in international policy decisions affecting the host country, observed:

  > *Even now for my current role, every now and again I do reach out to [a former associate in the host country] just for contacts. I'm sure if I asked him for a role, he'd be more than happy to share my CV around or help me identify people*

- **Participant #37**, a *Launcher* who studied international development and whose international aspirations were derailed by the COVID repatriations, found "*the networking element of [the program] has been really useful*" (T4). After consulting with former colleagues, they made "*a very deliberate professional decision"* to relocate to a (different) city in Asia to work part-time "*digital nomad-ing*" because:

  > *… a lot my colleagues or a lot of people I knew from [the former host country] are now in [the city]. So I knew that that would be a good hub to reconnect with former colleagues and that was great because I got to see my [former] manager there … I did that quite deliberately … just to get back into the sector*

- **Participant # 12**, now studying full-time, was inspired by an expatriate associate in the host-country to research a phenomenon that became an interest during the assignment ("*It's been super valuable … he's American so he's not part of the program, but … there's that yardstick that I'm measuring myself against*", T4).

- **Participant #49** has instigated a collaborative research project with former colleagues that builds the work they did together during the assignment and that will benefit her and her former colleagues professionally while also contributing to the host country communities with which she worked.

Like participant #49. other participants described professional networks have facilitated mutual benefit for themselves and others. The **case studies of Amelia and Willow** on the following page are two examples of these.

A different participant, a prosocial career seeker who had to adapt his career plans due to the combined effects of COVID and family commitments, used networks from the host-county to help establish a new partnership for the program that has already facilitated subsequent volunteer exchanges (#03). Another expressed plans to do similarly with their current employer (#24). Yet another continues to be the conduit for connecting host-country and Australian exchanges that have continued since the assignment finished:

> *There's a really nice relationship now between [the PO] and [the Australian organisation] … they'll keep going … [since the last visit] we planned the structure a little bit more and made sure that the staff were also getting benefit out of having the [Australian partners] there by way of them having access to professional development and support* (#28, T4)

Volunteer stories: Willow

Since being repatriated from a legal role with an intergovernmental agency in East Asia, Willow has remained strongly connected to several former colleagues. Four have since relocated to different destinations in the Asia-Pacific region, all still working in international development. Of these contacts, she says "*even though I wouldn't say necessarily that there were any tangible benefits, I consider them friends & I just like following their life & seeing what they're doing*" (T4).

Another former colleague relocated in 2021 to study a doctorate degree in Willow's home city in Australia. They meet periodically & Willow has "*supported them anyway I can*" (T4) to settle & adjust to living in Australia. She remains in touch with others in the PO, despite high levels of staff turnover. She was recently offered a paid role with the PO that would have drawn on her international development expertise in a different way to the assignment, a role she declined for family reasons.

Willow has also benefitted professionally from a former volunteer she met in the host country, who recently helped her access information relating to a current work project.

Volunteer stories: Amelia

Despite personal changes in the past few years preventing her from returning to work in the host-country, Amelia's ongoing networks in the host-country continue to inform her work & to assist her & others professionally. She continues to manage a clearinghouse website that she created, now in its 4th year, that makes available academic & media articles relating to host-country/regional issues. Data shared during the interview show that online visits to this site continue to grow (2023). Amelia also posts regularly on these topics on social media like LinkedIn, where:

> *… I'm getting a lot more information from other people that are talking about similar related issues & I've made contact with people both in academia & journalism who are some key voices in the area*

Through this, Amelia has facilitated work projects by connecting two HCNs despite her remaining based in Australia ("*This network that I've developed through Facebook means that I can put people in touch with other people*", T4). Although Amelia is yet to benefit professionally from this – "*friendships yes, but working/research collaborations no*" – she is "*still persisting!*" (email, 2024).

Amelia has also helped several former colleagues to find (& apply for) educational opportunities in Australia & elsewhere. This includes one former colleague who "*has reapplied this year & I'm helping her through the process*" (T4) - which has been helped by "*the fact that she has been able to access the Wi-Fi from [an office near] to where she lives*" (T4) - as well "*a few*" other HCNs for whom:

> *… I'm finding out information about what [study options are] available, and another person, I enrolled them in an online unit that was free & they completed that*

5.3 Professional Knowledge and Capabilities

Earlier reports mapped the range of professional knowledge and capabilities that participants attributed to their involvement with the program. This includes contemporaneous accounts of specific learning episodes occurring during their assignments and the main in-country and VPLJ experiences that contributed to these,[108] as well as their reflections on the biggest changes a year after the completion of their assignment.[109]

At T4, participants were again asked about the major impacts of their involvement with the program to date on relevant professional knowledge and capabilities, and their application of these to their work and careers. Interviews focused on knowledge and capabilities that participants believed: (i) they had learned or developed as a result of their involvement in the program, and (ii) that continued to be relevant and valuable at T4, three years after completing their volunteer assignment. Participants were also asked about which of these capabilities were being used in their current professional life (any full- or part-time employment or volunteering positions that drew on their professional knowledge and capabilities). In addition, participants were asked about the use and perceived value of their experiences on the program in applications or interviews for professional work roles, including promotions. This incorporates both paid and unpaid employment that draws on their professional expertise. This results of this analysis are presented separately in Section 5.3.1.

Section 5.3.2, meanwhile, focuses on the experiences of those volunteers whose assignments enhanced their formal education - either through consolidating or extending their past (pre-assignment) formal education, or by inspiring and guiding formal education that they undertook after their assignment.

5.3.1 Developing and Applying Professional Knowledge and Capabilities

The areas of professional development most frequently reported at T4 fell into five categories, generally consistent with those reported at T3. These are defined in the box on the right side of the following page.[110] The specific features of the volunteer experience that, according to participants, contribute most strongly to each of these outcomes is detailed in earlier reports and summarised in the figure at **Attachment 8**.[111]

Across the sample, the number of participants who report using professional knowledge or capabilities that they had developed during their volunteer assignment has risen substantially since T3. All but three participants who were working, volunteering, or studying full-time at T4 reported applying and using one or more of the five categories of outcomes (42/45, 93%).

Table 8 on the following page show the proportion (%) of each volunteer type reporting each outcome category (columns i to v).[112] The two outcome categories reported most often by each volunteer type are shaded green. The total reported in each outcome category is in the bottom row.

Below this, **Table 9** summarises how each group of volunteers has applied the professional knowledge and capabilities they developed during their volunteer assignment over the past two years (2021-23). The table indicates the proportion (%) of participants from each volunteer type who reported applying each category of outcomes. The outcome category reported most frequently by each volunteer type is shaded green.

Five most prominent professional knowledge & capabilities attributed to the program (T4)

i. **Cultural knowledge & capabilities:** Capabilities that improve the individual's cultural awareness (e.g., awareness of differences of perspectives stemming from one's culture), enhance intercultural competence & facilitate adjustment to culturally different work environments or situations (flexibility, adaptability). Includes culture-specific knowledge & capabilities relating to the host country or region (e.g., language proficiency, contextual knowledge, understanding features of the host culture), & culture-general knowledge & capabilities that improve participants' cultural awareness or enhance cross-cultural competence but which are not related to a specific culture/country (e.g., sensitivity to cultural differences, understanding the impacts of cultural biases, appreciating different ways of life).

ii. **Role performance & management capabilities:** Capabilities required to manage people & projects or perform work that are not specific to the professional domain. Includes people & management skills associated with capacity development (mentoring, collaborating, role modelling) & managing interpersonal relationships, as well as communication capabilities (e.g., listening & interpreting messages) & managing social & work interactions (e.g., developing relationships).

iii. **Domain-specific knowledge & capabilities:** Capabilities specific to individuals' professional field. Includes expanded technical knowledge or know-how, improved performance of domain-related tasks, more strategic outlook on profession or role & new domain-specific contacts/ networks.

iv. **Professional confidence:** Overall confidence in one's professional capabilities, status or legitimacy.

v. **Career direction or priorities:** Changed outlook on one's professional career direction or priorities and developing processes for achieving such changes (e.g., accessing information, developing professional relationships).

» Key Features of the Professional Knowledge and Capabilities Developed and Applied by Participants

As Tables 8 and 9 show, two sets of outcomes – "cultural knowledge and capabilities" (30%), and "role performance and management capabilities" (28%) – compromise more than half of the reported outcomes (Table 7) and are the outcomes that most participants continue to use in their workplaces (Table 8). Both were identified as being developed and applied by participants from six volunteer types.

Cultural knowledge and capabilities are discussed in detail in Sections 4.3.1 and 4.3.2. Of note here are two features:

- Numerous participants identified cultural proficiency gained during their assignment as important professionally. "Cultural knowledge and capabilities" was the chief outcome being used professionally by four of the seven volunteer types (Table 9) and by participants working in a range of contexts (domestic and international) and across volunteer types and age groups. This was also reported by 10 of the 13 participants who identified professional outcomes as the biggest impact of their volunteer assignment to date.[113]
- When discussing work-related knowledge and capabilities, "culture-general knowledge and capabilities" were much more abundant (and diverse) in their application than "culture-specific knowledge and capabilities", by a ratio of 6:1.[114] Host-country language skills were being used regularly at work by just two participants (#19, #41), although others had used the language periodically and in important work situations. The box on page 51 ('**Examples of applying culture-general knowledge and capabilities in professional settings**') shows examples of how participants applied in their work pursuits one aspect of this – by questioning pre-existing biases and being attuned to the benefit of alternative approaches in a variety of contexts.

The nature of **role performance and management skills** (reported by 27 participants) varied greatly. The most prominent capabilities reported across volunteer groups were 'mentoring' and 'capacity development', which were being applied by participants in a variety of corporate, government and non-profit organisations.[115] Others reported traits associated with leadership, managing change, managing interpersonal relationships, communicating and managing projects.[116]

The proportion of participants reporting **domain-specific knowledge and capabilities** has fallen since T3, and a small number continue to believe that their domain-specific knowledge and capabilities regressed during their assignments. Nonetheless, volunteers identifying this were firm in its value,[117] especially those working in international development, agriculture or health. As an example of the latter, participant #40's:

> *biggest impact is being able to learn two completely different fields in the health arena … having to learn hard and fast to get on with work. It's a fast-learning process and I think it's been quite surprising how much you can learn in such a short space of time and get on with the work* (T4)

Similarly, participant #45, who attributes his time as a volunteer to having a clearer understanding of the potential and actual impacts of a medical issue facing many people that he encounters through his current work, commented:

> *I feel like the realities of numbers wouldn't hit unless I had spent time there, because as an Australian … the numbers are just so unfathomable. I wrote an essay last year … I was doing some research & I was comparing our experiences in Australia and [the host country], and I had to double check the numbers so many times [because of the scale of the emergency] … I've seen the impact of that amount of death … it had such a profound impact* (T4)

Table 8: Percentage of each volunteer type who reported developing professional knowledge and capabilities (T4)

Volunteer type	i. Cultural	ii. Role	iii. Domain	iv. Confidence	v. Direction
Launchers (n = 6) 	50%	**67%**	**67%**	33%	0%
Enhancers (n = 7) 	29%	**57%**	**57%**	14%	43%
Career Breakers (n = 3) 	**67%**	**100%**	0%	0%	0%
Transitioners (n = 12) 	**75%**	**67%**	58%	25%	17%
Imposed Transitioners (n = 7) 	**57%**	43%	**43%**	43%	14%
Veterans (n = 10) 	**60%**	**30%**	30%	10%	10%
Non-working Partners (n = 5) 	**40%**	**20%**	20%	0%	0%
Total (% of all reported outcomes)	**30%**	**28%**	**24%**	**11%**	**8%**

Table 9: Percentage of each volunteer type who reported applying professional knowledge and capabilities (T4)

Volunteer type	i. Cultural	ii. Role	iii. Domain
Launchers (n = 6) 	67%	**83%**	50%
Enhancers (n = 7) 	**100%**	86%	71%
Career Breakers (n = 3) 	67%	**100%**	0%
Transitioners (n = 12) 	**67%**	**67%**	33%
Imposed Transitioners (n = 6)* 	43%	29%	**57%**
Veterans (n = 9)* 	**60%**	30%	50%
Non-working Partners (n = 2)* 	**50%**	0%	0%
Total (% of all reported outcomes)	**40%**	31%	29%

** Excludes participants reporting no opportunity to apply professional knowledge and capabilities in the period T3 to T4.*

i Cultural = Cultural knowledge and capabilities
ii Role = Role performance & management capabilities
iii. Domain = Domain-specific knowledge and capabilities
iv. Confidence = Professional confidence
v. Direction = Career direction or priorities

Outcomes reported most often by each volunteer type are shaded green in both tables

Examples of applying culture-general knowledge and capabilities in professional settings (T4)

According to participants, one of the most professionally valued capabilities developed during the volunteer assignment has been their capacity to more often & more effectively question pre-existing biases & to be attuned to the benefits of alternative approaches to viewing situations, solving problems of performing work. Participants shared examples of applying this in a variety of work settings. Below are some examples:

- Teaching: "*Difference matters. I bring in my knowledge from the [host country] & I consider Indigenous people's rights & connections with the land, & background beliefs & colonialism, all of those things … It's a big part of most of the subjects that I teach & increasingly so in Australia … I've seen real changes over the last few years with how that's impacted on how we educate … now I myself can see how impactful that is. Like in opening up to other ways of seeing the world & being in the world*" (#01)
- Managing: "*The AVP program has also made me realise some of my biases which I think I would not have recognised had I not had that in-country experience. For example, when you're working in the field office & headquarters comes up with you with a project, you go okay, I've got to do this, I get that I'm receiving a bit of money, but it might or might not be one of my priorities. And you understand the broader context, that they have other in-country priorities in addition to your project & you just take a different approach to things. I think that is one really significant achievement looking back because I do think it is a different perspective … you realise when you've had that AVP experience that you just don't know what is happening in those country offices & you don't understand that experience & to really spend more time teasing out those experiences*" (#53)
- Engaging with stakeholders: "*The idea of 'face', it is a valuable thing. It's a survival mechanism for just getting on, & I realise now that it's necessary, it's not self-deception. It helps one to just do what needs to be done. Before with my […] background, I would have been inclined to dig a bit to try & find out what was really, really going on, but now I realise that those psychological defences are at an individual family, community, social level, they are necessary … I'm finding myself doing this recalibration of, well, who am I in this situation? And I am seeing myself as a […] & whoops there are many other ways of engaging & I should be careful. So yes, I am more aware. I sent an email to friends who were in DFAT & got the answer back, yes, they said, I know what you mean … that does my head in at times*" (#15)
- Consulting: "*It really brought that kind of difference [between the host country & Australia] into sharp focus … you can learn to understand about the Indigenous people of a particular place, like New Zealand, or Australia, or the United States. But I think you really need to look at Indigenous peoples in many other countries in the world as well to really understand. That's something I think I've certainly learnt from working on [the host country], for sure*" (#05)
- Mediating between & integrating views of different groups of people in an organisation or team: "*A lot of my role at the moment is reviewing reports & budgets & making sure we're meeting [donor's] & international best practice standards … It's almost like my role is translating what's happening on the ground into [donor's] language or into the language of my board. The board ask so much that I'm like, this is just wasted time. It's hard because obviously you need it written down on paper & it needs to be recorded & you need to do your due diligence. But at the same time, it does take away time from people on the ground actually doing their job. So, I think probably [the assignment] taught me that people generally have thought through things, but it's just not written down in this Westernised style …"* (#14)

Not evident in Tables 8-9, *Enhancers* and *Launchers* were the groups reporting the most abundant use of these professional competencies in their workplaces more generally. Participants in these groups frequently identified multiple capabilities within each set that they used regularly.[118] These groups – with the youngest mean ages of participants – were also the most likely to report "professional confidence" (and second most likely to report "career direction or priorities") at T2 and T3. As Tables 8 and 9 show, the salience and utility of the program's impacts on both these outcomes has declined in the three years following participants' volunteer assignments.

Taken collectively, involvement with the program has been more beneficial for the development of 'soft skills'[119] that support communication, relationships, and problem-solving more strongly they did from developing technical, domain-specific knowledge and capabilities. The **case study of Melissa** on the following page is illustrative of several participants who reported the volunteer assignment being helpful to employment prospects and to performing work despite limited opportunities to develop domain-specific knowledge and expertise, and despite her career not following its expected path after the COVID pandemic. In particular, Melissa's account highlights the transferability of 'soft' and chiefly intercultural capabilities that several participants reported developing during their assignments – interpersonal skills, empathy, flexibility – despite not working in overtly international settings since returning.

Volunteer stories: Melissa – Developing and applying 'soft' capabilities in a new career direction

To accept her volunteer assignment, Melissa resigned from a government position that involved internationally-oriented programs & policies. She later said, "*I think I was just sick of working for the government at that time*" (T4). Choosing volunteering over an alternative plan for adventure & work in North America, she saw volunteering as an opportunity to combine getting "*on the ground experience*" in how "*policies & programs are implemented*", having the "*amazing experience to be able to live as somewhat of a local*" as well as "*giving back*" (T1). She expected the assignment to be "*a really fun experience, but also really good for my career moving forward... so the best of both worlds*" (T1).

Melissa "*absolutely loved"* her assignment with a domestic NGO but had mixed feelings about its professional benefit (T3). Reflecting at the end of her assignment (T2), she believed that she had "*developed a lot of skills definitely relating to my ability to be flexible & agile & adaptable & resilient."* This included having to dramatically adapt how she mentored & supported her PO colleagues as she became more familiar with the needs of the PO & what was feasible in her role. She also benefitted from seeing the policy-practice nexus in international development that she had previously observed from just the policy perspective (T2). However, language barriers between her & her colleagues, the POs' limited resources & an unrealistic position description meant that "*coming down to more technical skills in my profession … I probably didn't develop much*" (T2).

Melissa had originally hoped to use her volunteering experiences to contribute better to government policy in the region and/or in either gender or international development (T1). However, her experiences "*steered me away from [a career in] the development sector*" (T2) particularly in areas where there is a lack of resources. At T4, she explained:

> *It feels like a waste of money if you can't sustain the outcomes … I've worked in not-for-profits before & it is a really hard slog. And I think you have to really acknowledge that you'll be working really hard for not a lot of money & [consider] if you have it in you or not*

When weighing up the next career move after her assignment, Melissa spent time "*trying to connect the dots*" (T2). Her assignment helped her develop "*a better perspective*" (T3) that led her to re-assess her previous government role, believing "*I do want to continue my work in [the government department] & I think the volunteer program really solidified that for me … it's given me a better understanding of why it's important that Australia continues relationships with every country"* (T3).

Not long after her repatriation Melissa was offered a more senior position at the same government agency, a role that came about through an existing relationship. It was a good fit with her volunteer experiences, and she felt that she was able to apply her understanding of "*people in [the host country region] & how they think about Australia … the way different cultures interact … it's enabled me more to put myself in other people's shoes, like trying to think of the perspective of other people more*" (T3).

Personal circumstances led Melissa to subsequently accept a more senior leadership role with a different government department with a domestic focus. Her assignment was "*definitely*" important to her being offered the role. She reflects that "*the real skills I brought out of [the assignment] were good leadership skills, good personable skills, just understanding how to work with people that have different motivations*" (T4). Her experiences with the program, she believes, have "*definitely*" made her a better manager ("*no question*", T4) & are important to how she now leads her team of six that comprises members from backgrounds that provided widely different experiences to her own. She is thankful for the cross-cultural experiences in the host country that, she says, have helped her (T4):

> *… being able to manage people who were so fundamentally different from you is an amazing [skill] … being able to amend my style to fit in with what worked best for them was a huge learning curve … trying to understand the perspective of other people a bit more, that experience has been really valuable & really transferable*

» The Impact of Volunteering in Applications for Jobs, Promotions and Other Professional Roles

In the two years since T3, 36 participants (72%) have drawn on their volunteering experiences when applying for new work positions – applications for new jobs (n = 29), promotions (n = 3), entry to programs of study (n = 2), and/or membership to paid or voluntary boards or committees (n = 3).[120] This figure excludes all applications to subsequent international volunteer positions through the program (remote and in-country).

Mostly, although not unanimously, participants believed that their program experiences were beneficial in these applications.[121] Twenty-six felt their volunteer experiences were evaluated favourably and contributed positively to a successful outcome.[122] Participants who reported (at T2) that their pre-assignment position description (PD) was generally accurate (i.e., the written PD at T1 accurately reflected the type of work that they were asked to do during their assignment) reported stronger benefits in job applications (T4).[123]

Fifteen participants reported their volunteer assignment being a central feature of their job application and/or interview. One *Launcher* described it being "*100% of my CV*" (#19). Eleven participants felt it had just a minor positive impact on their application. All seven *Enhances* and large proportions of *Transitioners* and *Launchers* found their experiences were well received by prospective employers, even in situations where their applications were unsuccessful. Two *Non-working partners* (#18, #21) sought and have commenced full-time work since their assignments. Both were able to identify aspects of their experiences that were favourably received during the application process.

Just two participants reported their volunteering experiences as detrimental to subsequent job applications: one *Transitioner*, now in their third role since returning from the assignment, believed their prospects were hampered by a lack of local/domestic networks and knowledge and the "*very different context … it's a different audience, it's a different skillset*" (#52). An *Imposed Transitioner* who has since retired, felt that their age and long period outside the (paid) workforce were factors in not being offered employment (#36).

Among the features that employers appeared to associate most positively with participants' program experiences are:

- demonstrating participants' cross-cultural acumen;
- providing experiences working in different and/or challenging contexts (e.g., "*Having that experience and resilience and flexibility, it shows those kind of strengths; adaptability, a bit of an adventurous spirit I think also helps and so they are getting a picture of me that I can work and respond in different contexts*", #08); and
- providing experience working in a specific sector.[124]

These were especially appreciated in government, health, education and international development sectors.

Other participants reported specific activities or projects they undertook during their assignments as being perceived as especially valuable (#14, #45). Four participants attributed their success in job applications to being able to explain ways their cross-cultural experiences would transfer to other contexts (e.g., disability) and to certain roles (management).

Also perceived as important was participants' capacity to demonstrate tangible impacts of their assignment – three reported this as favourably received (#02, #24, #28) while others found their inability to demonstrate firm outcomes an impediment. The latter was most common for volunteers in domestic NGOs and government offices. Some participants reported benefitting in their applications from the overall confidence gained during the assignment. Like at T3, a small number reported benefits primarily to their résumé rather than their professional capacity ("*Just being able to say, yes, I've worked in lower and middle-income countries, is a big tick*", #27, T4).

At the same time, participants also encountered difficulties translating their volunteering experiences in ways that prospective employers saw are beneficial. The box on the next page ('**When is a volunteer assignment not as helpful in applying for professional roles?**') summarises some of the main challenges that participants encountered. To overcome some of these, some participants downplayed the voluntary nature of the work, focusing instead on the role itself or the reputation of the PO. Some volunteers whose assignments were with domestic NGOs or government agencies reported some difficulty translating the context of their work, verifying their achievements, and/or eliciting references from PO management in job applications.

Local community services, retail, and business/marketing/tourism are some sectors perceived as least receptive to the benefits of the assignment.

When is a volunteer assignment not as helpful in applying for professional roles?

- **When volunteers struggle to clearly explain how the context of the work can be applied to a domestic (Australian) setting** ("*The only trouble I had was that idea of managing a project over there doesn't translate, it's very different. Even if [recruiters] don't know how it's different, cos they don't know how it is over there, they just always assume that it is [different]*", #45) ("*It's a bit hard to actually explain why I was actually there & what I was actually doing. But I remember my boss when she interviewed me & still to this day she sees it as a good life experience … they see it as a benefit, but I don't know that necessarily it comes across as like a 'job skills' benefit. It's more of a life experience, a good life experience to have*", #11)
- **When employers see little relevance in international work experiences** ("*When I was interviewing, people didn't value the international experience. It wasn't relevant. There were only a certain number of organisations based in Australia that are working in an international space*", #08)
- **When the skillset used in the volunteer assignment differs to that required of the job** ("*I think they don't see the role as important as […] … they want people who've been there and done that in that [local] ecosystem rather than in a volunteering ecosystem or a developing country ecosystem … it's a different level of requirements*", #52).
- **When misunderstandings or negative attributes are attached to the term 'volunteer'** ("*I just don't mention it's a volunteer position anymore. Because I just feel it's misleading for the lay person it's like a misleading word", #45) ("I think [the interviewer] touched on [the volunteer assignment] … it more gets brought up [in interviews] as interesting … I don't know if I necessarily discussed the work part of it, it's more the experience. I feel it's hard for people to understand it, I think. When explaining that this is a government program, it's volunteers, but you're skilled - a lot of people don't get it*", #11) ("*I'm 99% certain that they just looked at it and said hasn't had a real job for five years; too old; see you later*", #36).
- **When volunteers are unable to or feel uncomfortable using PO supervisors as referees** ("*Nup, no, I didn't [use my PO supervisor as a referee], the skillset just wasn't really comparable, I wasn't given enough to do, basically, for them to be a strong referee. I had got really positive feedback on everything that I did, but it all felt quite piecemeal, to be honest … it's not really a skillset that I would want that to be referred to when I've got much better experience otherwise*", #07)
- **When employers are concerned about volunteers wanting to leave to work abroad** ("*The question always comes up with concerns about whether I'll stay in the country or not. I guess that's been the major concern that people have presented - once you have international work, are you going to disappear & work internationally again?*", #35).
- **When relevant domain-specific skills are not used during the volunteer assignment and/or are perceived to be diminishing, most common among *Veterans*** ("*My skills are diminishing. [Working in my professional area] needs recent skills & my recent skills are diminishing*", #25)
- **When the volunteer assignment's formal position description is very different to the nature of the work that volunteers are asked to perform:** Two-thirds of participants whose assignment design was accurate (at T1) reported that their volunteer assignment was strongly beneficial during job interviews (at T4). Just 26% of volunteers who had inaccurate position descriptions felt the same.

5.3.2 Consolidating, Extending, Inspiring and Guiding Formal Education

At T3, participants' volunteer assignments were shown to enhance their formal education in two ways: as a context to consolidate or extend formal education completed prior to entering the program (model 1), and as an impetus that inspired or guided subsequent studies after their assignment (model 2). These two models are summarised in **Attachment 9** and outlined in Section 5.3.3 of the Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers 2019-2021: Final Report (April 2022).

The strongest residual impacts have been experienced by participants whose assignments inspired them to pursue subsequent formal education programs (model 2). Twelve current participants were inspired in this way, most motivated by career benefits.[125] At T4, 10 of these (83%) reported benefitting professionally from their post-assignment studies, despite some discontinuing their program of studies before completing it. Six identified their studies as a platform for a career transition or progression; five through using the knowledge from their studies in their work (T4) and one by being offered a job.[126]

The **case study on the following page is of Richard**, an environmental scientist who had five years' work experience at T1 and whose "*intentions for volunteering were more pragmatic than altruistic"* (T4). Although he always believed he may return to further studies, volunteering was suggested to Richard as a way to "*fill a bit of a gap in part of my CV*" (T1).

As the case illustrates, **Richard's** volunteer assignment helped to "*crystalise the work that I want to do and the pathway to achieving that … the space to understand a bit more of what the […] world looked like and what the pre-requisites were and I think I realised at a minimum because you're competing at an international level that a masters [degree] was appropriate and necessarily, it made that choice easy*" (T3). Richard "*came home in March and was studying by July*" (T3), with his in-country experiences guiding his choice of degree and helping him perform well. He now works on a government funded science project which, he says, derives directly from his studies. Reflecting on the impact of his volunteering assignment, he believes:

> *[The biggest impact of my assignment] has to be professionally … it provided me with a focus that allowed me to pursue a field & achieve well at university, provide me with the confidence to go & study it & the focus to study it well & the experience to draw on to apply that through my university. Without having achieved well in that space, that was a catalyst for that confidence to build in myself professionally & now I've landed a really good job that I really love & can see pathways to reintroduce […] into my career as well (T4)*

Volunteer stories: Richard - A volunteer experience inspiring formal education

Pre-assignment (2019): Motivation to: (i) develop career experiences & direction, (ii) gain exposure to international career pathways, (iii) supplement résumé with broader professional experiences

"I have made a conscious decision to shift away from [my current work] to more … international projects. This is a step in that direction. I was advised by a friend who works in the humanitarian world that the AVI program was a good way to get some runs on the board … I'm not saying it will, but the opportunity to network & open some doors is there … I think it's a longer-term experience & knowledge gathering thing for me" (T1)

Assignment (2020): Despite premature repatriation, achieved: (i) exposure to sector, (ii) understanding of requirements & skills needed to work internationally, (iii) experience of international dimensions of work, (iv) guidance to choose education program

"It gave me a real perspective of the sector that I want to work in, the vast majority of them were positive insights & ideas about how I should focus my future studies, what sort of work is available to me, what sort of work would I like to do … I have been busy applying for universities … I realised that my skills are not in creating […], it is more about sharing those – that research & that knowledge – effectively, so it clarified in my mind an ambition to work in […] as opposed to research & development … professionally [the assignment] provided extensive exposure to a centre into which I want to work & that is invaluable" (T2)

Post-assignment (2021): Postgraduate studies guided by volunteer experience resulted in: (i) supplementing skills with formal training in the new sector, (ii) applying volunteer experiences to coursework & assessment

"I realised that the […] work was something that I was very interested prior to the assignment, but the assignment really gave me a clear picture of what that could look like & allowed me the opportunity to explore what the path was to achieving the career goals that I wanted to achieve. I was speaking with someone the other day about contentment & I've felt a lot more comfortable with the path that I'm taking; for a long time I had an idea of what sort of life I wanted to lead & what sort of career I wanted to have & I think the program was good in helping me define that goal & the path to it as well … as a student I certainly feel more qualified to be involved in that sort of thing ... I've certainly made an effort to direct my study in that way & […] is a specialisation within the […] degree & I've selected that … whenever I select courses or how to conduct pieces of assessment it's very much with a focus on – certainly not emulating the sort of work I did in [the host country] but using that experience as an insight into what is important in the work that I would do in that field … understanding what the pathway looks like & what the end jobs might look like really did give me a strong motivator to do well & find the right thing & study it well & work through that process … the comfort of having a clearer picture of what my career looks like, that's provided a level of contentment maybe or satisfaction & confidence in undertaking things that maybe wasn't there prior … the exposure that the program gave me some professional confidence & direction" (T3)

Post-assignment (2023): Full-time employment with government-funded research project: (i) developing skillset in Australia, (ii) considering international job opportunities that combine volunteering experience, formal education & professional experiences

"[The volunteer assignment] has certainly had an important, positive impact on my career … … it was the next step in a series of goals that I saw as important to achieving the sort of work that I wanted to do … I ended up studying […]. I finished my degree, then briefly worked for the [university] as a research assistant. My intention for doing that was to remain engaged with the networks I had developed through my study and networks working in […] a few short weeks later [a friend] pointed out a position at […] in a newly formed government program … seeing this, just the opportunity of the job allowed me to really focus on how to [use my knowledge] … I suppose my experience in [the host country] & the subsequent focus on […] provided me with a broad perspective of how […] happens both in Australia & overseas & an appreciation for the contextual factors that influence the work that we do … I think that it contributed to the richness with which I see […] happening in different contexts & really directs my thinking & appreciation for the contextual factors … (W)hat happened in [the host country] was I recognised that there was a lot more to know about this … I saw it as an opportunity to contribute in a way that I now feel confident & comfortable in. It highlighted for me the importance of […] & that became my focus. And while I saw practicing […] in an international context, bringing it back to my experience and my work now has been challenging but a comfortable shift, I feel. I feel happy in this place" (T4)

Of the several participants studying disaster risk management (graduate certificate) following their assignment,[127] none use it regularly in their work although some see it as a valuable addition to their résumé.

Ten participants reported at T3 that their volunteer assignment had consolidated or extended previous studies (model 1).[128] All have seen some residual benefit from these experiences. Eight now work in roles with a strong international focus that draw on their experiences transferring formal education to a new context as volunteers. Six of these identified professional/career outcomes as the main overall impact of their assignment.[129]

» Further Studies to Consolidate or Underpin Professional Opportunities Created by the Volunteer Assignment Since T3

Since T3, some participants have undertaken additional studies that have arisen from new career pathways or jobs that were secured since their assignment, and which, in turn, were instigated or facilitated by their program experiences. In other words, for these participants, the volunteer assignment enabled a subsequent professional opportunity that has since been the basis for them to extend their formal education.

In these cases, the studies were commenced with the aim to consolidate or underpin the professional opportunity that arose directly from their volunteer experience. An example of this is **the case of Susan**, on the following page. Susan's experiences as a volunteer were the impetus for a change in career direction and for enrolling in future education - twice. She is now completing a doctorate degree that, she believes, will open future work opportunities, including in the host country, where she hopes to return at some stage.

Like Susan, the two mini cases below show how participants' volunteer experiences created work opportunities that have subsequently led to further educational opportunities that continue to build on and benefit from these volunteer experiences:

Case 1:

Following her volunteer assignment, participant #46 was recruited to help manage an online platform of a non-profit organisation that aimed "*to promote opportunities for Australians and young people living in Australia who want to get involved in purpose-driven work*" (T3). She said at the time, "*[The employers] were very aware of the AVI program and so they know the kinds of people that do AVIs … I did give them examples of my work [with the PO] that we'd been successful [at] through my AVI position, so it was all that experience definitely that led them to end up contracting me*" (T3). As well as being promoted since T3 ("*all that kind of work has literally laid the ground for what I'm able to do now*", T4), the employer has sponsored her studies in "*a Business Operations diploma"* because *"[my employers] want us to move more into the business side of things and the strategy side of things*" (T4). Although the studies are "*a bit more of a slog, basically, I don't love it*" (T4), she hopes to use these skills to help her employer by "*being part of a core team that brings it to a place where way more people can get involved*", as well as "*learning as much as I can about philanthropic space … I think it has tremendous capacity to really step in in places where governments can't*" (T4).

Case 2:

Participant #09, who had no prior contact with the host country and whose assignment sparked a passion for a new professional field, has undertaken two formal business studies programs since T3. Both are linked her work, first as an acting CEO where she "*grew the revenue quite quickly, it's gotten quite a few awards, got lots of grants and got some investments*" (T4) and subsequently as a member of the boards of multiple social enterprises.

She explained, the first course was "*a business management in arts and culture, grad cert … [that is] quite applicable to what I did in [my volunteer assignment], I've used what I worked on there quite a few times in discussions in the lectures and in the classes*" (T4). After completing that, she is "*now doing a diploma of governance as well … that's just because I'm a Chair on a [social enterprise] Board now and just making sure that I don't do anything silly and lose my money*" (T4).

In 2023, several organisations tried to attract her to work with them ("*people are coming to me now wanting me to work on some really cool stuff … a lot of them were businesses that are either trying to pivot, some of the big not-for-profits, just because of what I did [as acting CEO of a social enterprise] … or even just putting together some strategies for them on how they can grow*", T4). Nonetheless, she hopes to soon devote her time between Australia and the host country:

> *… working on projects that meet my goals on […], that's what I'm interested in, pick up work in different locations across Asia and be a bit more hybrid, be able to move around … my ideal would be 50/50, structured so that people would know that I'm in [the host country] over the winter … that would be my ideal* (T4)

Volunteer stories: Susan - Finding "direction, passion & a tangible pathway for getting there"

Susan had just three years of professional experience when she entered the program. At T1, she believed her future might involve "*some kind of upskilling or retraining … pursuing a slightly different career path within the [health sector]*" in which she worked (T1). She saw the assignment as an opportunity to "*use my skill set to … help improve a particular area … a sustainable change for that community*" (T1).

Despite being curtailed by COVID, Susan's assignment was "*an amazing experience … great personally & professionally … a really positive experience*", defined by the relationships she developed, her deep engagement with the local culture & *"achieving so many positive things*" (T2).

A major change for Susan during her assignment was "*figure(ing) out over the course of the assignment … where I want to be [with my career]*" – specifically, shifting focus from individual-level health care to community-level health care in order to "*make change for lots of people, I think I am better at doing that*" (T2). She subsequently enrolled in and completed a post-graduate degree that, she believed, would assist this transition, with the hope of "*try(ing) to go back to do an assignment in the public health space*" (T2) in the host country.

COVID prevented Susan from returning to the host country as soon as she'd like. During this time, she found local work & continued her studies, both of which benefitted from her assignment in multiple ways (T3), such as: (i) creating professional opportunities (e.g., during job interviews she "*drew on a lot of examples or problem-solving*"), (ii) performing her work in Australia (e.g., "*it made me ask more 'why' questions*" & helped her to better empathise with clients who had similar life experiences to those she'd worked with in her host country, T3), and (iii) achieving better results (e.g., stronger university marks, better outcomes for clients; "*a lot of those skills in terms of different communication styles & building rapport have made such a difference*", T3). Pertinently, through these opportunities she believed that she derived more meaning from her work & life, explaining at T3:

> *It feels like it has a purpose … being a volunteer gave me more of a structure to what 'meaning' is, what value it is & how that can all work … it's an actual tangible thing not just the ideal. Being in the program changed that part of it. It's a bit more structured & a bit more holistic. It's not work & life; they're a part of the same*

Since then, Susan's professional & personal lives have continued to evolve. She returned to the host country in early 2022 to volunteer with "*the same partner organisation*" in a "*slightly different role … I wrote the position … my plan was always to go back to finish the assignment*" (T4).

According to Susan, "*a lot of [the follow-up volunteer assignment]*" drew on her post-graduate degree, "*building health promotion resources, evaluating the program & pulling out [the PO's] data & looking at what they'd been able to achieve with their current structures & where there's opportunities for program & quality improvement*" (T4). She also helped to organise a research symposium for the host government health department & supported colleagues in her PO to prepare for & present at the symposium. These experiences proved critical to Susan's next career move - entering a scholarship-funded doctoral program at a G8 Australian university. She explained (T3):

> *I could see how much [the PO staff] valued being able to contribute to that space. It was just cool to be part of that & there's something about figuring out problems & doing that in a way that contributes to bigger knowledge that's important to me*

Susan believes that her experiences as a volunteer were valuable because (T4):

> *It gives you that credibility … it just seemed from chatting to the people that I was working with in-country & then speaking with my supervisor … it ended up shaping where I am now … it just felt like the next right way to consolidate everything I'd learnt from all my clinical roles in public health and put it all into one project*

Susan now balances her PhD studies with part-time work, hoping to work "*in a public health organisation & working on problem solving, health equity & how we make health more accessible for people who live in the Pacific & in regional & remote areas & are from different cultural backgrounds*" (T4). She says that:

> *I don't think I would be doing a PhD if I didn't volunteer … going to [the host country] & having those experiences opened up other opportunities & other interests that I may or may not have gotten to along the way, but it definitely was a factor in studying public health & then moving into a PhD & thinking more about the value of research in what I want in my job than I probably would have before* (T4)

Reflecting on the impact of her assignment, Susan believes that it:

> *… gave me direction, definitely helped me nail down my passion & a more clear vision of where I could be effective … now I have a tangible pathway for getting there & the networks & people to draw on for support & advice to be able to make this happen … it gave me opportunity to broaden my skillset & confidence & then also just to think about the impact of things, like the value of research, the value of connecting with people & networking & all of those types of things & how it all feeds back into each other* (T4)

5.4 Career Progression and Professional Capabilities: Key Findings and Emerging Implications

5.4.1 Key Findings

- The sample's career positions have improved since T3 and are generally favourable against their pre-assignment careers. That is, when compared to earlier waves of data, at T4 a larger proportion of participants who want to work are working, are working in their chosen professional field, and are working in roles that provide satisfaction or meaning.
- The number of participants who reported using professional knowledge or capabilities that they developed during their volunteer assignment has risen substantially since 2021. All but three participants who were working, volunteering, or studying full-time at T4 reported using professional capabilities that they developed during their time as volunteers (42/45, 93%). They also found their volunteer experiences as generally beneficial when applying for new work opportunities or jobs, although employers' misunderstandings about the nature and relevance of the volunteer work were commonly reported.
- Involvement with the program has been more beneficial for the development of participants' 'soft' professional skills than it has been for their technical (domain-specific) proficiency. The two skillsets most frequently developed by participants during their assignments and now used in their work are "cultural knowledge and capabilities" – especially culture-general proficiencies that improve participants' cultural acumen beyond the host country – and "role performance and management capabilities," that assist participants manage people and projects related to their work.
- Involvement with the program has been professionally beneficial for most participants seeking to transition to prosocial careers. This includes several – mainly *Transitioners* – who have achieved this transition since T3.
- Professional networks were formed by a relatively small number of participants during their volunteer assignment (T2) and some of these have subsequently dissipated. Nonetheless, the professional benefits from these have proven resilient across both T3 and T4. These networks have led to participants' involvement in international partnerships linking POs with other organisations in Australia and elsewhere (e.g., formal and informal skills exchanges), projects (e.g., research, educational, IT), employment offers, or consulting opportunities.
- Participants who used their volunteer experiences to consolidate prior (pre-assignment) education have seen residual benefits from this consolidation, with more than half of these identifying professional/career outcomes as the biggest overall impact of their assignment to date. Even stronger and more objective professional benefits are reported by participants whose volunteer assignment inspired subsequent (post-assignment) studies, the outcomes of which have been transferred to their workplaces and opened new career pathways for some.

5.4.2 Emerging Implications

Not all volunteers enter the program seeking to benefit professionally from their volunteer experiences. Nonetheless, the numerous volunteers with career-related motivations (T1) and the relatively large financial and opportunity costs of international volunteering make understanding the professional costs and benefits of particular interest to most volunteer programs.

The unusual circumstances of participants' repatriation, in the midst of COVID, and participants' own responses to the pandemic, make categorical claims about the career impacts of the assignments to date difficult. In general, however, on the basis of participants' objective career status since their assignment (T3-T4) and their perceptions of impacts of their volunteer assignment on their professional interests, knowledge and capabilities (T2-T4), the study to date has **emerging evidence that involvement in the program can have professional benefits by providing the context for volunteers to increase professional confidence, develop valued professional knowledge and capabilities for some roles, and access professional opportunities, including by testing or stimulating interest in new career pathways**. Despite the strong impact of COVID, the results so far also support the notion that the program provides experiences and knowledge that can assist volunteers to access further work in international development (see Section 3.6.2 also). At the same time, the fact that many of the participants' subsequent careers have involved transitions to new professional areas and/or vastly different contexts suggests that many of these benefits have broad application beyond just 'international development' work.

The professional benefits to date have been most pronounced in young volunteers who entered the program with strong career motivations, and in sectors that value the international exposure and 'soft' professional skills that have been the main outcomes of the assignment (T2-T4) and that are transferable to practice (T3-T4). Involvement in the program may also be especially beneficial for people with the interest and appropriate skills to transition to prosocial careers by providing access to networks, knowledge and professional

experiences that are valued by volunteers and legitimated by gatekeeps in these professions and sectors (T3-T4). This group's experience also carried the greatest professional risk, making the structural and support features of the program especially important.

For volunteers with professional and career interests, issues relating to the *development* of relevant and valued professional knowledge and capabilities, and their ability to *transfer* these to other areas of their professional lives are germane. Both are briefly discussed below.

» Developing Professional Knowledge and Capabilities

Data across three waves of interviews (T2-T4) support the identification of the five categories of professional knowledge and capabilities that volunteers develop (box, page 49) and the main in-country experiences that contribute to these (**Attachment 8**[130]). An amalgamated framework that maps the most valuable professional experiences and outcomes, refined with input from participants at T5, is likely to assist the program and volunteers to consider or plan professional/career outcomes in advance, and as a tool to help volunteers understand and articulate professional outcomes in ways that help them demonstrate, share, and benefit from these.

In this, we see frameworks like these as especially beneficial mechanisms to prime volunteers to recognise professional development opportunities (pre-assignment) and to form images about how and where these can be applied in the future or to specific new situations. Such frameworks for reflection may be especially valuable for 'soft skills', which can be easily overlooked, can be difficult to articulate, and are mainly accessed by reflection (see 'Transferring professional knowledge and capabilities' below, and the different forms of reflection discussed in Section 6.6.2).

At the same time, much of the professional development instigated by the assignment has occurred despite some participants' reservations about the suitability of the PO and the design of the role (T2-T3) – points that were reiterated by some participants at T4. As highlighted in previous reports, participants continue to believe that the main impediments to professional benefit from volunteers' in-country experience centre on (i) the (in)accuracy of position design, and (ii) to a lesser degree, POs, which some participants believe have difficulties supporting both the assignment success and volunteers' full capacities. While both these conditions created opportunities for learning (e.g., resilience, flexibility, understanding new professional domains), participants continue to view these as counterproductive to their assignment performance and their professional development (T2-T4). We therefore see the quality of 'fit' between volunteers' pre-assignment expectations and skillset, the design of the volunteer assignment, and the PO environment, as among the most pressing enablers of volunteers' professional development during their assignments.

» Transferring Professional Knowledge and Capabilities

Participants' responses show that many volunteers succeed in transferring their professional skills to vastly different setting, despite the context-specific nature in which volunteers develop these.[131] Nonetheless, as the box '**When is a volunteer assignment not as helpful in applying for professional roles?**' on page 54 shows, the nature and value of the volunteering experience continues to be misunderstood by some employers, and to be poorly explained or demonstrated by some volunteers.[132]

While most LSAV participants held few expectations of post-assignment career support from the program, opportunities exist for the program to assist both groups (employers and volunteers) to close this gap. Efforts to help employers in some sectors better understand development volunteering through communication, outreach and/or formal letters of reference – either instigated by the program or prepared in collaboration with POs - may increase their awareness of the variety of outcomes associated with the program specifically, and of international development volunteering more broadly. Volunteers' input to references or statements of achievement (e.g., by articulating the main knowledge and capabilities they used and learned) might provide dual benefits of helping employers understand the nature of the volunteer's experiences and assisting volunteers to 'speak the employer's language'.

On this, volunteers' absence from their home professional networks and related knowledge base – especially domain-specific knowledge – continues to be pertinent. Data across different time periods suggests that this may be especially acute for volunteers who were deeply embedded in the host country as a result of their pre-assignment knowledge and experiences (T1), working in isolated locales, and/or being hosted by a localised PO (T3-T4), despite these providing some of the most learning-intensive environments (T2-T4). Volunteers in these situations may benefit from particular interventions before, during and after their assignments to help them retain and use (home country) domain-specific relationships that can assist their post-assignment career paths.

6 Personal Circumstances and Capabilities

6.1 Overview and Background

The fourth major outcome analysed in this study relates to the program's aim to help volunteers "gain personally" from their assignments. It addresses the impact of involvement in the program on:

1. Participants' **health and wellbeing** (Section 6.2);
2. Participants' **personal development**, via the development of personal attributes and attitudes that participants identified as contributing to their personal lives (Section 6.3);
3. Changes to participants' **day-to-day habits, hobbies, and practices that we collectively refer to as "lifestyle**" in Section 6.4; and
4. Participants' **personal relationship with family and friends,** including their ongoing relationships with other program volunteers (Section 6.5).

The key findings and some emerging implications for the program are summarised in Section 6.6.

Background: Summary of participants' personal circumstances and capabilities (T1-T3)

Most participants held multiple motivations at T1 that combined individual and altruistic functions. 'Values' (expressing important values like social justice or helping to make a difference), 'enhancement' (growing and developing personally or psychologically), and 'career' (gain relevant career experience) were each reported by more than 50% of participants.

By T3, 83% of participants attributed some form of valued personal development to their experiences on the program. Six main areas of personal development were identified: confidence, sense of pride/satisfaction, resilience, cosmopolitanism, self-awareness, and acceptance (more relaxed). These occurred in work and non-work situations, and tended to arise from the challenges, novelty, meaning and connections that their experiences on the program provided them.

More than half of the participants also reported nascent lifestyle changes that they linked to the different living conditions and ways of life that they encountered in the host country. These include attitudes or behaviours reflecting anti-consumerism, environmental sustainability & work-life balance, as well as prioritising family, relationships and/or health over other activities.

Extraneous occurrences also influenced participants' experiences during their assignments. The global COVID pandemic and perceived inequalities associated with the impacts of this, and global social movements like 'Black Lives Matter' and 'Me Too', led to quite profound changes in how some participants viewed and experienced their assignments.

Almost half (45%) of the study's sample reported using the program's medical services, being hospitalised or medevacked during their assignments (T2). At least five participants used the services of *Response Psychological* at some stage during their assignments; several others considered doing so.

Moreover, a period of protracted uncertainty after their repatriation due to COVID lockdowns after their assignment affected many participants personally and professionally. Just under half (44%) had difficulties readjusting after their assignment; this was more common for those who were forced to repatriate due to COVID protocols. In the 12 months since their forced repatriation due to the COVID pandemic, at least nine participants – mainly young *Transitioners* and *Enhancers* - sought professional health care for issues associated with their mental wellbeing that stemmed from the assignment, the challenges readjusting in the context of COVID, or a combination of these.

6.2 Personal Health and Wellbeing

This was a period of great change for many participants. As the box '**Births, marriages, deaths and namesakes**' on the next page makes clear, one or more participants married, became first-time parents or grandparents, commenced or ended relationships, underwent major surgery, overcame major health challenges and economic hardship, and took on substantial new caring responsibilities. These build on the physical or emotional challenges encountered by many participants during their volunteer assignments and in the immediacy of their 2020 repatriation.[133]

Nonetheless, all but three participants reported no residual impacts to their health and, in general, most participants are now more settled and happier than they were at T3. One participant, for instance, who "*ended up seeing a psychologist for a number of months*" following the repatriation (T3), reflected at T4:

> *[My assignment] definitely made me more resourceful in that you do really have to rely on other people to pull you through some of those things, you can't do it all yourself. So I guess it helped me with reaching out for support when I need it … I think it made me better at using my resources in terms of when I need support and also knowing where my limits are in terms of what I can take on*

Three participants (#41, #43, #52) believe their assignment led to negative health consequences, although all three now work full-time, have taken steps to manage and improve their health, and attribute some beneficial outcomes to their experiences with the program. Two of these linked ongoing physical ailments to events experienced during the assignment – one involving a breach of trust by HCNs on social media (#43), the other to a "*work environment where there was lots of stress*" (#41). At T4, they continue to be affected:

> *I have been sick a lot since then, honestly, and it's probably contributed to my sense of not wanting to be as sociable as before. I think it has had some ongoing impact in that sense* (#43)

> *With how severely it affected my physical health and the fallout from that, that was quite traumatic. I don't think that that's something that I'll ever get over. It was probably one of the most scary and traumatic experiences of my life* (#41)

For participant #52, ongoing challenges stem from both the sudden repatriation and financial insecurity since returning to Australia. A *Transitioner* who before the assignment hoped for "*really interesting opportunities for me in a career sense … I see [the assignment] as a stepping stone*" (T1), he found that the position "*was the pathway to my dream job, it allowed me to see what my dream job is, but then also the experience took away my dream job. I was put on a plane and then sort of left on my own*" (T2).

Since returning, he has found that:

> *I probably underestimated the impact of the circumstances of my departure and the impact that it had on my wellbeing. I have had some problems of late which I don't fully attribute to the circumstances of my departure, but it certainly made a contribution and probably I needed to take better actions to deal with that. With the pandemic, the recession, the lack of economic security, I have to do what I have to do to survive. It probably meant that I neglected my mental health and my wellbeing. I suppose my survival instincts in terms of providing professional security, economic security sort of came to the forefront rather than my own personal wellbeing* (T4).

Births, Marriages, Deaths and Namesakes

Major personal changes have affected the sample's reflections on their volunteer experience & their lives since ending their assignments. One became a parent for the first time. Two became first-time grandparents. Four are planning families. Two participants have married their long-term partners since the assignment – one of these believes the volunteer assignment was important in helping them connect better with their new partner's family (#43):

> *My 6 months in [the host city] was like a boot camp for a simulation into my new family, essentially, because they've got very strong family values & religious values which I previously would have found quite challenging to navigate. But I feel I had a crash course in that while I was in [the host country] & it made me really value a lot of things far more than I did previously. So I think in that way it has been really relevant personally, still today*

Of the four romantic relationships that were instigated during the assignment, three continue. Two participants returned to the host country when borders re-opened after COVID to be with their partners. The third remains in Australia with a "*plan for [the partner] to come here for a few years & then we'll figure it out.*"

Sadly, one valued LSAV participant passed away soon after T3. Five participants highlighted the impact that deaths of former PO colleagues and/or HCN friends have had on them. One with strong host-country ties lost three former colleagues & neighbours in accidents or medical mishaps. She observed (#24):

> *I really thought, my god, we have lots of difference between them & us. We're very lucky we have all these security systems & alarms & things that make our life quite safe & we forget that we've got these things … it makes you realise in advanced nations just how protected we are*

Another volunteer's former direct counterpart "*passed away about 6 weeks ago quite suddenly*" on the back of "*a lot of people in my social media feed [having] passed away in the last few years, probably from COVID … there was a period when it was quite morbid*" (#29). These experiences led her to reflect on the contribution that her assignment made:

> *I'm not sure how much I contributed … I was thinking about that quite a lot because it's this situation where one of the closer relationships, the people who I probably spent the most time with, is just gone … I guess partially there's that sense of legacy that is still definitely left & seeing how other people are constructing their sense of being [after the death]. [The person] constructed a lot of meaning & purpose … all the [other host-country] NGOs sent out [condolences] & so you could see the impact this one person had by basically taking the time to build a lot of relationships & have the key piece of the knowledge & information that he thought was important to get out there … so there's, I guess, a legacy in the sense of how you think about meaning in your own life*

Other participants explained how their ongoing contact with former PO colleagues was affected by deteriorating health or other conditions in POs that hampered their contact.

In contrast, a participant with strong ongoing relationships with PO colleagues (#28) was delighted to learn recently that:

> *One of my colleagues named their baby after me, a little boy … they named him […]. It's a huge honour … they call it 'a namesake'. So culturally I'm connected to him & his family*

6.3 Personal Development

Personal changes were identified most frequently by participants as the biggest impact of the volunteer assignment to date (see **Panel 1**),[134] although as the following extreme examples illustrate, three years after their assignments ended there is great variation in both: (i) the extent to which participants' involvement with the program has influenced them personally, and (ii) the extent to which participants are confident attributing personal changes to their experiences with the program.

"I really enjoyed when I was over there, meeting other people & we did things that I probably wouldn't have done before … but it hasn't really changed me, no" (#44)

"I think it was a really formative time for me, maybe more personally than professionally … [it] has really lodged itself in my mind & in my heart. I was there for just under a year, but I think it's such a complex place & I felt really lucky to do the work that I was doing to get to dig into that" (#07)

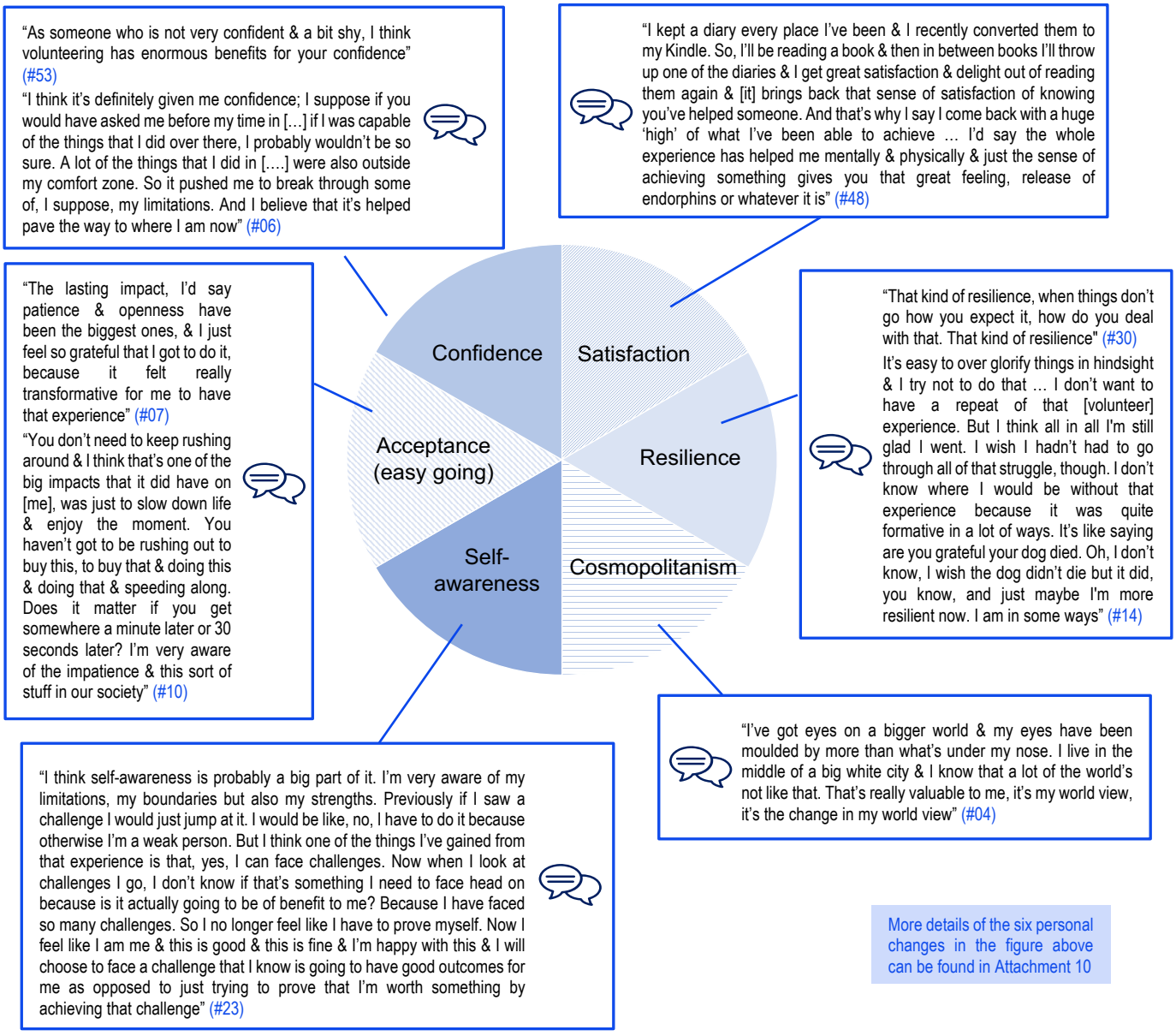
"I think because it is so hard to unpick from COVID … I really don't know on that one, just because it's so caught up with COVID" (#45)

"Huge. Changed my life for the better without a doubt, a hundred & fifty percent. I wouldn't even have to think about it. It's been one of the best things I've ever done" (#04)

At T3, participants reported six main forms of personal development arising from their volunteer assignment: (1) confidence, (2) acceptance (easy going), (3) satisfaction, (4) self-awareness, (5) resilience, and (6) cosmopolitanism.[135] These are summarised in the figure at **Attachment 10**.

All six were commonly reported again at T4 as continuing (valued) personal changes that participants associate with their assignments.[136] **The top of Figure 10** on the following page includes examples of how participants described these as salient changes in 2023 (T4).

Figure 10: Overview of main personal changes (T4)



As the bottom of **Figure 10** shows, a seventh personal change, which drew the largest number responses at T4[137] but was rarely mentioned at T3, is an **increased appreciation for personal relationships**. Respondents reporting this used terms like "*valuing*" or "*seeing the benefits of*", "*building a relationship*", "*wanting to connect with a community*", and "*just deeper friendships*." One spoke of a desire to "*put more effort into making sure that I had the skills and the capacity to keep in contact with a few of friends, especially now that … my friends have just moved overseas*" (#20). Half of the participants reporting this change at T4 had enacted concrete lifestyle changes in response to this (see Section 6.4).

» Experiences Contributing to Personal Change (T3-T4)

Four main assignment experiences were identified as the chief contributors to personal change at T3: (1) confronting difficulties associated with the PO, resource availability, work role, interpersonal interactions or living conditions ("challenge"), (2) coping and performing work (or non-work) activities effectively in an unfamiliar culture, environment, language, work role and/or context ("novelty"), (3) having work objectives, relationships and impacts that are significant and of value personally and to others ("meaning"), and (4) collaborating, mentoring, socialising and sharing work/social settings with colleagues, clients, counterparts and communities ("connections").[138]

Combining responses from T3 and T4, **Table 10** on the following page summarises the main assignment features that, according to participants, contributed to each of the seven personal changes reported.[139] It includes illustrative descriptions of the way some of these experiences contributed to participants' learning.

In weighing up the experiences that participants reported as contributing to personal development at T4, three observations are noteworthy:

- Participants value the learning scaffold provided by the program's support: Participants have increasingly recognised the value of the learning support provided at pre-departure and in-country via the program's VPLJ and other activities ("*Looking back, I was thinking, oh wow, I was so lucky, it's such a well-structured program, I was so well supported, you grow a lot from the experience*" #06). Previously, most (although not all) participants valued the program's support in preparing for (T1 and T2) and coping with (T2) the volunteer assignment, and for cultivating relationships with volunteers (T3). More participants at T4 expressed gratitude for the contribution of these preparation and support mechanisms to the benefits and learning opportunities that their experiences provided. This includes two participants who were mildly critical of PDBs (T1 and T2). It is especially true of the value provided by the relationships formed and the cultural awareness insights and techniques that were shared. Participant #54, for example, appreciated how this support provided "*a far more immersive experience in some ways … allow(ing) you to step into a workplace that was [local], and it was a privilege because it was like looking through the goggle box and seeing a life in [the host country] for what it was … we were part of a well-established structure*" (T4). Participant $06 appreciated that the support "made everything a lot easier, it allowed me to just concentrate on my assignment" (T4). Another (#37) appreciated:

  > *… having those cultural sessions and especially the language sessions that was so important and all my friends thought the same and that's why we continued them afterwards, a group of [volunteers] and I. It really was just more thoughtful* (T4)

- A two-way relationship exists between satisfaction and meaning: Participants' descriptions suggest a strong connection between the outcome "satisfaction" and the sense of meaning derived from the assignment. As the box '**Personal satisfaction: For volunteers, meaning is both an outcome and a catalyst of personal change**' on page 65 notes, participants identified multiple ways that a sense of meaning served as their motivation for participating in the program (T1), contributing to personal changes (T3 and T4), and as an outcome in its own right in the form of personal satisfaction – either through personal achievements (e.g., overcoming hardship) or through achievements resulting from their volunteer efforts ("*I felt like I was making a difference and it was very rewarding*", #36). The assignment experiences most strongly associated with increased meaning and satisfaction were being able to experience or see the impact of one's contributions (outcomes/achievements) and the nature of the volunteer role and context ("*hands on*" or "*grassroots*").

- The right balance of assignment challenge, novelty and meaning is critical: Participants' accounts of the ongoing influences of the assignment (positive and negative) highlight the importance of the right balance in assignment conditions. That is, the degree of challenge and novelty proffered by the volunteer role and in-country conditions were again identified as the strongest contributors to personal development (especially "resilience" and "self-awareness") **and** as the primary impediment to their learning ("*language and culture I think were the main issues [that limited learning opportunities], just in terms of being a young woman in a regional area … it was a bit difficult*" #30).

Table 10: Main assignment features contributing to personal change (T3-T4)

Personal change	Assignment features				Notes
	Challenge	Novelty	Meaning	Connections	
Satisfaction			X	X	Strongest when volunteers are able to see the impacts of their contributions via tangible achievements or outcomes, 'hands-on' roles, access to PO information post-assignment
Resilience	X	X			Although perceived favourably, often associated with negative experiences (i.e., excessive stress, isolation)
Cosmopolitanism		X		X	Arose from both deep cultural immersion & opportunities to communicate with people holding different views (including age cohorts, professions). Strongly supported by VPLJ activities
Self-awareness	X	X		X	Sometimes associated with negative experiences &/or adjustments to work & lifestyle
Acceptance		X		X	Most often inspired by observing cultural attitudes towards work & life; an issue some participants reporting this change had thought about prior to their assignment
Confidence	X	X	X		Reported most often by volunteers with fewer years of work experience
Relationship orientation*	X	X		X	Supported by VPLJ activities & cross-cultural encounters

** T4 only*

More details of the first six personal changes and four contributors can be found at Attachment 10

"I think the ongoing positive impact is that I'm just a stronger person. I think the experiences of isolation probably were very revealing for me & it's something that I now know about myself & know it very clearly. So it's something I'm very aware of. So if I'm, for example, going down a path where I'm finding myself more isolated, whether that's as simple as working from home too much, I know the consequences of that, I know the impact, so I change up things so that I'm not experiencing the negative sides of that. So I guess it's that learning that I've taken from all of those challenging experiences" (#23)

"It's a pretty major experience in my life, it's something not many people get to do because it is such a change. I moved overseas when I was younger for a bit, but the experience is so different because in […] everybody speaks English & you can get around & all these things. But the personal challenge of being in [the host country], it had so many challenges, but it had so many unbelievable benefits that I think that was a huge learning curve for me & that isn't something that could be easily forgotten" (#31)

"Just that I could go to a country like […] & within less than a year set up a life for myself that felt really full & adventurous & that I could ride out the challenges that come with living in a developing country, like various illnesses & viruses & safety issues & that I could do that" (#07)

"The young people I met on the program I found very inspirational, & I thought they were wonderful, I thought they were great. I found them really inspirational. I think the older people, I can't say I felt one way or another about them, but the younger people were inspirational, they were doing this to further their careers because they could do it & I presume it's a steppingstone in a career for many young people & it's what they have to do nowadays to set their careers where we didn't have to do that" (#10)

Personal satisfaction: For volunteers, meaning is both an outcome and a catalyst of personal change

Participants raised the importance of deriving meaning from their involvement in the program in multiple ways: as a motivation for participating in the program (T1), as contributor to positive personal changes that the assignment furnished (T2), and as an outcome entwined with their post-assignment work & other activities (T3-T4).

Four participants identified the sense of meaning derived from the assignment as the biggest impact of their volunteer assignment to date (#05, #24, #29, #48). One spoke of a strong realisation "*that you can, through using various means, make change that improves people's lives*" (#24). For another, "*the lasting impact [on me] is about how you define your sense of meaning & place in the world*" (#29). All four are now involved in various pro-social endeavours: multiple subsequent international volunteer assignments (#48), working in international aid and development (#37), pro-bono consulting work on Indigenous heritage issues (#05), and establishing international volunteering partnerships via their current employer (#24).

Several participants were inspired by their assignments to (continue to) seek meaning in decisions they made about subsequent work (#20, #32), studies (#28) or volunteering (#15, #33). Others discussed features of their experiences that contributed to the satisfaction they derived from their volunteer assignments as important. For example, three identified the value of observing the impact of their volunteer endeavours (or not), through the nature of their volunteering role (e.g., "*the contribution is a little bit less tangible. It's not like you do a specific project & then you can say, I built that hospital or whatever it is, I'm not sure that I got that kind of immediate or definitive outcome*", #39, T4) and/or their ongoing contact with the PO ("*I'm very happy … to see where they are now compared to where they were 3 years ago … I'm so excited for them & I'm so happy that I have a small part in that*", #44, T4).

As a counterpoint to this, other participants identified their lack of fulfilment due to a forced repatriation as a motivation for return visits to the host country ("*we left in such a hurry, it felt like there was a lot unfinished there*", #07), ongoing support for POs ("*mentally I've never really left [the host country] … I was still helping them out with Facebook & social media & stuff. I just felt I'd been detached from my family*", #26) and/or subsequent volunteer assignments:

> *I wasn't ready to say enough. I wasn't ready to really make long term commitments in [Australia] to being part of an ongoing social welfare, community engagement program. I know what I get the most satisfaction from … helping somebody to negotiate the interweaving of their cultural norms & practices with the objectives of a western international world … I feel better about going home after all of this [current assignment]. I'll be clearer in my own head, I think (#15)*

Three participants attributed their volunteer experiences to them re-evaluating the meaning of their work. For instance, one participant's experience made them realise that their current government role enabled them to "*help people and do something meaningful … it doesn't have to be overseas, doesn't have to be volunteering, but I can still do something meaningful in the public sector*" (#30, T4). In contrast, participant #19 achieved his pre-assignment objective to "*segue*" (T1) to a role with a government department ("*I want to network with people who are in [a government department] when I'm in [the host country] and try and move over there",* T1). Having achieved this, he now misses "*the impact*" (T4) his work as a volunteer had, observing (T4):

> *You realise that there's a bureaucracy in place, you can't really implement things the way you want to do it. So obviously with the volunteer program I felt like I had such an impact but working for […] & working in my current role … I'm not connected to it as much. I'm just typing emails … it's not as impactful as living there & seeing [the impact], like when I was at [the PO] I developed a child literacy programme & seeing kids actually being interested in learning … you kind of miss the impact*

6.4 Lifestyle Changes

Clear throughlines from T3 to T4 are apparent in the lifestyle changes that participants attributed to their experiences on the program.[140] Some consciously or subconsciously discontinued lifestyle changes that were reported in 2021 – the reasons for this were not explored. Some participants reported, and a few lamented, forgoing earlier changes and returning to "*normal life*" (#18) due to other priorities – family planning (#21), parenting (#30), or work (#18). Others were stronger in their convictions about these lifestyle changes and/or the impacts of the assignment on these.

The main lifestyle changes that participants attributed to their time with the program at T3 remain current and are being enacted, to varying degrees, by 27 participants (54%); roughly the same proportion as T3. **Figure 11** shows the six main categories and the number of participants reporting each at T3 and T4.[141]

As identified at T3, two main types of in-country experiences were again identified as the main catalyst for these changes, most strongly related to the 'novelty' condition identified in Section 6.3: experiencing different living conditions in the host country (including relative scarcity), and vicarious exposure to the consequences of different ways of work and life, both favourable and unfavourable.

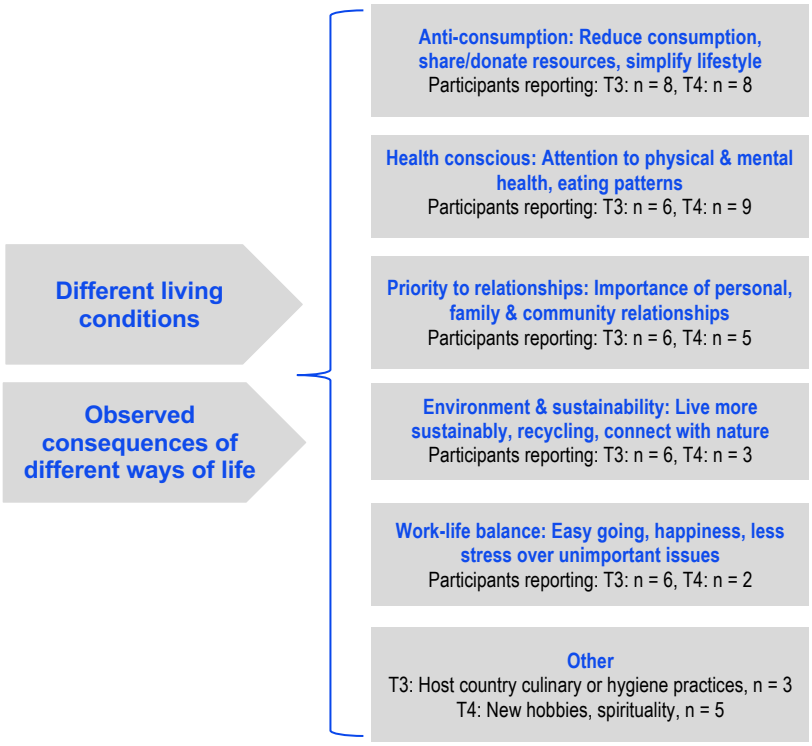
Observing caveats made at T3[142] and again at T4 regarding inferring the causes of lifestyle changes (see the box below, '**Research note: Interpreting the impact of a volunteer assignment on lifestyle changes**'), the results thus far offer support for the view that volunteering can be the impetus or a catalyst for beneficial lifestyle changes.

Research note: Interpreting the impact of a volunteer assignment on lifestyle changes

The unusual work & living conditions created by COVID in 2021 made us cautious about predicting the longevity of some of the reported changes at T3. At T4, participants reporting changes were generally clear in drawing links between these & their experiences on their volunteer assignment. Nonetheless, several participants had expressed pre-assignment interest in certain issues (T1) that later manifest in lifestyle changes. Most participants acknowledged that sustained changes were only partially a consequence of the assignment. In short, pre-existing interests & extraneous circumstances (notably COVID) played roles in many changes reported. Thus, it likely more accurate to infer that involvement in the program amplified or provided the inspiration for certain lifestyle changes rather than being the sole contributor.

Supporting this, some participants who have continued lifestyle changes reported earlier have become more circumspect about the assignment's direct impact. Participant #30, for instance, noted in 2021 that "*I have tried to be less consumerist. I actually have been trying to not buy stuff that I don't need, especially clothes. I get second-hand clothes now because you see people, you see where it's made and how much people sacrifice to get one t-shirt & you're buying lots. I'm eating less meat because I didn't eat much meat there [in the host country*]" (T3). At T4 she observed that she is still "*trying to consume less, I don't buy new clothes kind of thing",* but is more tentative about the cause*: "I don't know if it's because of [the volunteering experience], maybe it's a little bit*" (#30).

Figure 11: Lifestyle changes attributed to program experiences (T3 and T4)



Of the six lifestyle changes that participants linked with assignment experiences at T3, "health consciousness" is the one that continues to be enacted among the largest number of participants. Participants enacting greater "priority to relationships" and "environment and sustainability" are the changes that have drawn the most enthusiasm from participants who have embraced these changes in their life, while "work-life balance" has been least persistent among those reporting it at T3 ("*I knew it wouldn't last and it couldn't last so I made the most of it [in 2020], which was good. I've now gone the other way and I need to come back and find the work/life balance again … it's a work in progress*", #02, T4).

As the bottom of **Figure 11** shows, five participants reported lifestyles changes reflecting a **stronger spiritual or religious focus** to their lives ("spirituality"). These were some of the strongest responses observed at T4. Participant #06, for example, was interviewed soon after returning from an extended spirituality-focused period volunteering overseas that she connected to experiences in the host country, which:

> *… was quite a spiritual place with all the temples and things like that. Just the connection I felt with the local people & how generous they were and how open they were. I think, looking back now, it probably changed something in me which led me down the path of wanting to explore more spiritual endeavours … the value of helping people and just connecting on a human-to-human level* (T4)

Participant #43's assignment in a remote location with a strong dominant religion was "*definitely harder than I thought it was going to be*" (T2). Interviewed just prior to finishing her assignment, she described:

> *… the city that I'm living in, it's a very hard place to be. It's not really quite like anywhere I've been before, it's not a very welcoming place to outsiders and it's a very closed city … I have to have a religion here and I'm not religious. So, I feel there's been large elements of my personality that haven't been allowed to come through while I've been living here and it has been quite tiring* (T2)

In the year following her assignment, she still believed "*it was definitely a very big experience and it gave me very different experiences to anything I ever have before, so in that sense I feel like it's given me a broader world view, I also appreciate what I have a lot more*" (T3). Two years later, now married and living in Australia, she reports "*quite a big shift in perspective"* (T4) regarding religious beliefs and practice. She now attends religious ceremonies regularly with her new extended family, in part because of *"the very, impactful, intense experience*" (T4) she encountered during the assignment, explaining:

> *I think in the year before my assignment, I was becoming open to the idea of being religious. And then living in an environment that's just so immersed and centred around religion, I think accelerated that. I wouldn't say it was the reason for changing completely but I think it definitely accelerated it far quicker than it would have otherwise been … I just observed this level of contentedness in nearly everyone I met that I had never seen before on such a large scale … and*

> *I'd also never been in an environment where religion was never questioned before. I think seeing the positive impact it had on people's sense of community and how willing they were to help other people as a result of it, I saw the positives. I saw a lot of negatives as well, there was a lot of things that I didn't like about being there, but there's also a lot of things that I don't like about society in Australia, and I feel like I've tried to take the things I like about each and incorporate those* (#43, T4)

Some participants explained enacting lifestyle changes as continued efforts to 'recreate' a volunteer lifestyle that they enjoyed – for example, reading (#04), socialising (#37) or continuing hobbies like surfing (#08) or exercise (#31). The desire to enact these lifestyle changes was a prominent determinant for three participants who relocated from urban to rural environments: two to grow their own food – including **Carly, whose case study is on the following page** - and one for better work-life balance (#26). In each case, the relocation was "*something I was already interested in … but [the volunteer experience] made it more prominent*" (#35).

In addition to the lifestyle changes identified in **Figure 11,** the issue of financial precarity and instability was raised at T4 more often than T3. Although just a small proportion of participants – mainly young participants (*Launchers* and *Transitioners*) who entered the program hoping their volunteer assignment would open a career pathway – this was associated with economic regression that participants link to a combination of (unsalaried) volunteering and COVID's impact on global economic conditions. Three participants reported this as impinging on their lifestyles in palpable ways at both T3 and T4. Several other identified it as an increasingly important consideration in recent or current career and civic decisions. The box '**Financial insecurity before and after international volunteering**' draws attention to the way these issues have been discussed at different stages of the study.

Financial insecurity before and after international volunteering

The many different financial implications of volunteering with the program have continued to influence participants at T4.

For many participants at T1, the decision to volunteer carried substantial financial risk. Although it was not specifically raised in interviews at T1, a few participants spoke about the financial implications of volunteering when discussing their motivations or expectations associated with their volunteer assignment. Some identified this time in their lives as suitable because "*I don't have a mortgage, I'm not at that stage where I'm looking at settling down, getting married, having children which is obviously going to impact what I'm able to do internationally*" (#35); "*I have at least enough money to save up to be able to travel & go overseas but, I don't have anything steadfast to keep me here*" (#20). Others considered financial implications of the assignment duration ("*I would've loved to stay longer, but because I have a mortgage and a life here, I couldn't afford to stay any longer*", #02). Others noted their financial freedom as an enabler of their decision to volunteer ("*I'm a little bit financial now, so I guess that's one of the big things, being financial, less financial responsibilities, I can do this sort of thing now without too many headaches*", #03).

In contrast, one participant highlighted the relatively attractive financial support provided by the program compared to some sectors in Australia – e.g., the stability of a relatively long-term contract, relocation support, health insurance, and a stipend comparable with the cost of living. Some homeowners were able to generate income from arranging to rent their homes for the planned duration of the assignment. Nonetheless, 35 participants were forgoing regular income from paid work at T1 and 19 had resigned from a paid role solely to accept the assignment. Two thirds of the sample (33/50) lacked the security of a paying job to return to at the completion of their assignment (three participants had confirmed work roles to which they could return, others had retired or did not anticipate seeking work upon the completion of the assignment).

In subsequent interviews, participants have more frequently raised issues of employment insecurity & financial wellbeing stemming from their involvement with the program. Uncertainty associated with the repatriation & COVID disruptions, local & international labour market changes, & rising costs of living (including housing) were major contributors to this, especially at T3, but also at T4 for some participants:

> *… it's left me in a more precarious situation I'm living in rental accommodation, I've moved house 1-2-3 times in the last 12 months* (#29)

> *My head was just above water for a long time, for the last 3 years. I'm probably treading water with my head a little bit higher. What I see at the moment is that the last 3 years have been quite challenging. It's really made it a challenge to my resilient reserves & now I'm just trying to rebuild that … I think the rawness is still there in terms of the repatriation. I'm working through that rawness, it's taken some time for me to do that & it would have been nice if the program was a bit more supportive in that* (#52)

Two participants have experienced financial stress that has shaped their views of the program & their overall experiences. At T4, several volunteers identified financial concerns as important career considerations, including those seeking careers in international development & other prosocial sectors ("*I guess at the point we are in our careers, if we went to go do something again it would probably be something that has a bit of better pay associated with it*", #31). Financial implications were raised as a rationale for declining, not seeking, or deferring civic participation opportunities (T4), including in-country & remote volunteering:

> *I guess my thing now is … if I can do similar work & get paid that would be easier for life. Because even when I did it last time, because I've got a mortgage, I had to save up heaps of money before I went to be able to still make my mortgage repayments to go. So doing paid work makes more sense* (#02)

> *Right now, no [I wouldn't volunteer again], that would primarily be because of having to pay for mortgages & the cost of living & stuff at the moment. But in terms of when I'm retired, I would definitely consider it* (#35)

> *I'm not sure what the payment situation is [for remote volunteering] but it is small. So I think financially that would make quite a dent* (#21)

> *$30 a week [for remote volunteering] is meagre. I mean it's understandable it's volunteering but for a full-time role to be remote but still having to live somewhere like Australia for instance it's not happening* (#37)

Volunteer stories: Carly - Planting seeds abroad and at home

A recently retired *Veteran*, Carly started her assignment with a desire to "*give back to society, it's my passion for social justice … I've always wanted to volunteer overseas, it was one of my retirement plans*" (T1). She believed that her "*very privileged life*" had made her take "*many things for granted"* & that with "*migration crises & refugee crises & climate crises … we really need to support people to be able to live lives in their own countries*" (T1). At the time, Carly had few plans beyond her volunteer assignment, but saw herself "*back in [her home capital city], age isn't on our side … perhaps continuing to volunteer, building on what I've already been doing"* (T1).

Carly & her partner were based in a Pacific island capital city. The assignment exposed them to some of the "*disadvantages & the inequalities in the world … the contrast between where we live & how our neighbours live, without sanitation & power*" (T2). She reported a number of major changes in perspective arising from her experience, including a better understanding of climate change sparked by "*some really fantastic experiences talking to people when travelling … one of the places we went to, they grew crops, the ground is too hot, there's too much water, & [the crops] go rotten in the ground before they can pull them out*" (T2). In discussing how this impacted her she said:

> *I actually see climate change affecting these people, you know, they talk to us about climate change affecting [them] – there are poor people who live off what they can grow, many of them, & they live without power, they live without sanitation, & the climate change is affecting how they can grow their crops, what they sell. I've seen poverty & hardship … but this is another step beyond that (T2)*

At the time, Carly noted that "*it makes me angry. It makes me feel, what can little me do? What can I do? If I go out on the streets & march against climate change, yes, I go & march for justice for refugees … I do try to be a voice where I can, but …*" (T2).

Since then, Carley has continued supporting her PO (including a formal remote assignment). She also "*put a lot of energy into the Twitter political sphere*" (T3), repeating that "*I'm ashamed of the way we behave in the world in our political sphere … I'm ashamed of our stance on climate change*" (T3). While pessimistic ("*I fear for my grandchildren's future*", T3) she believed that "*seeing that you can live a simple life, you don't have to have all the trimmings*" (T2) during her assignment helped her during COVID because "*I think [the host city] prepared us for this … we don't actually miss [things] in lockdown … we don't miss going out for a coffee. It's not important. We don't miss not being able to go out for a meal. It's not important … so personally, perhaps the experience because of what we've done has helped me cope more with having a more simple lifestyle*" (T3). As an example of this, she recounted a particular experience *"the first week I was back*" from the volunteer assignment when:

> *I went up to Kmart … I had to get out of the shop. I couldn't stand all the lights, the brightness, the affluence, the wealth, the self, the privilege. I had to get out; I couldn't cope with it. So personally, I think yes, I've changed my view on many things* (T3)

Since 2021, Carly and her partner have relocated from a capital city to a large rural block. She explained:

> *This is partly because of the [the host country], partly for our view on life. We just wanted … some space around us & we could just live a basic, simple life. We're growing our own vegetables, I'm revegetating the garden … we're doing basically food production & native vegetation … we saw how simply people lived in the [host country] & how contented they were & I think it's just an accumulation of so many things over time from the [host country] & over life because climate change & the environment are huge concerns & we can't change it, but we can do our little bit* (T4)

Carly has joined a local walking group & volunteers locally ("*the community we're in is quite an active community*", T4). They now "*live a basic, simple life … not such a cluttered lifestyle*" (T4). She hopes to focus the next few years on "*farming, family & just local volunteering*" (T4).

When asked about the major impact so far of her experiences on the program, it was the decision "*to move to a simpler life*", a result, she says, of "*seeing daily the people, the simplicity of life. It was lovely, actually. You don't need all these material thing … it just touched my heart*" (T4).

Carly takes pride in her volunteering experience & is open to another assignment. According to Carly, her partner believes the assignment "*had a huge impact*" on them (T4). This is something with which Carly concurs: "*It has had a huge [impact], more on my thinking & my approach & how I see life & see the world than anything else I've ever done in my life*" (T4). From her new home, she says:

> *I'm glad I had the [volunteer] experience … we go in [to the host country] for a short periods of time, short bursts, short impact. You might sow a few seeds, you can do a few things, make a little bit of a difference, a small chip away, perhaps* (T4)

6.5 Personal Relationships

6.5.1 Relationships with Other Volunteers

> "I would call them good friends. For example, […] is one my closest friend & considering that when you're in your thirties it's really hard to make friends. [My partner] & I were just saying we have no friends except maybe our volunteering friends" (#30)

> "They're good mates, very much so. I think they're similar types, have similar interests & similar passions. I think it's probably the greatest thing I got from the volunteering program, the friendships & relationships that I have developed as a result [of] volunteering" (#52)

> "They're both in [a different State], so it's all very much online, social media, that kind of thing. We mostly just share if something happens that one of my friends knows that I'm interested in. She'll send it, forward me a news article on […] or something like that or we'll have small discussion about how we're both going with work & stuff like that. So not really strong like I talk to them every day, but I do chat to them, keep up with their lives & everything" (#20)

> "I think one of the [volunteers] was curious to develop more skills in my area. So he asked for some courses to do & then he's also sent different jobs through. I guess when people have had [job] interviews, I've personally supported people when they have wanted to know how to respond to questions around trauma recovery & that kind of stuff, or they will just put on a post, looking for feedback. Very informally but certainly supporting each other where we can" (#08)

> "I think maintaining connections through volunteers, whether they were with you on assignment or you met them through other ways, is really important. It shows you the bigger picture, I think, because when you're on your assignment that's the only experience you know, whereas meeting other volunteers, particularly ones who have done other assignments, you get a much bigger picture of the program & what it's capable of (#30)

In the three years since participants' assignments were completed, the relationships that have remained most resilient are those with other volunteers. Although some relationship shedding has occurred and the intensity and frequency of contact has declined for many, 43 participants (86%) continue to maintain meaningful relationships with one or more volunteer that they met during their assignment. Eighteen (36%) had exchanged messages with or heard from a volunteer in the past month.

Ten participants identify other volunteers as among their best friends now.[143] Three identify the formation of these friendships as the strongest impact from their involvement on the program to date.[144] Even participants whose contact with other volunteers has declined view these relationships as a central feature of their volunteer experience. A small number of participants also reported establishing (new) close friendships with volunteers since their assignment through the program's alumni events.

Most participants reported declining frequency and intensity of contact ("*It has dropped off somewhat*", #54; "*it's diminished now*", #19). This was attributed to changed circumstances ("*It's not the same as being in country*" #06), changed geography ("*We all moved to different states during COVID, whereas I think if that hadn't happened I would have stayed much, much closer with […] and […]*", #43), personality ("*I'm not super good at keeping in contact with people*", #29) or simply that "*you just kind of lose contact*" (#19). The experiences of participant #23 (T4) is illustrative of this:

> *[During COVID] we were catching up fairly regularly, maybe once a month, having a bit of a chat over Skype because we were all in different parts of the world. I don't think I've had a chat with them for a while but we still keep in touch over Instagram, a few messages here and there. We message each other for birthdays and comment on each other's posts. I know a couple of the girls in that group have visited one of the girls in the country she's in. I wasn't able to go because I couldn't afford it but I know that invitation is always there and we have that chat every now and again. So I think it's less intentional or less regular contact, but I have no doubt that I can rock up in […] and give her a call and we would hang out and she would put me up. The same for the other girls. It's a connection that you have regardless. It's like seeing an old friend after 20 years. You have that connection; you have that shared experience and I think especially around the way we finished our assignments with COVID and everything, it's another level of a shared experience that just bonds you. So I have no doubt I could reach out to any of them and catch up with them any time*

The volunteer-volunteer relationships that participants reported as strongest are disparate. While a shared geography was an important catalyst for developing these relationships - most relationships that continue are with volunteers from the same host country and which were formed at ICOPs and strengthened at other in-country VPLJ activities - many are now inter-State and international. Like other relationships, most are sustained mainly via social media, although several reunions with cohorts of in-country volunteers - including hosting and visiting interstate volunteers - have been reported. Two participants have undertaken return visits to the host country with other volunteers. Two others have travelled abroad to attend weddings of former volunteer colleagues.

Participants who identified personal relationships with volunteers as particularly strong or valuable were asked the reasons for this, and the benefits, if any, that these networks provided. Their main responses are in the box on the following page.

What makes volunteer networks so strong and so valuable?

- Shared understanding of experiences & challenges
- Shared interests & values (like-minded people)
- Intensity of shared experience (challenging circumstances, limited resources)
- Access & bonding provided by VPLJ activities, especially ICOPs
- Tightness of in-country networks (regularity & intimacy of contact)
- Support given to & received from other volunteers during & after the assignment

What personal and professional benefits do volunteer networks provide?

- Access to career & work opportunities
- Exchanging information of interest relating to the host country, international development or other shared interests
- Better understanding of the program's broader impacts (beyond their own experiences)
- Receiving & giving professional or emotional advice & support
- New friendships, including across age categories & at times of life when developing new friendships may be difficult

The **case study of Samantha** on the next page illustrates several features of these relationships – the benefits they provide during assignments, the reasons why connections are strong, and the challenges of remaining in contact when life returns to normal.

Of the seven participants with no ongoing volunteer connections, four are *Veterans* or *Non-working partners*. Several reasons were given by participants who do not retain contact with other volunteers, including personal choice, living in an isolated location now, living in an isolated location during the assignment (thus limiting opportunities to develop relationships), and bad experiences with one or more volunteers during the assignment.

Volunteer stories: Samantha - Forming friendships and drifting apart

Samantha entered her assignment having just completed university, with two years of work experience & a desire for "*a career in [the] non-profit [sector] just because of where my values lie*" (T1). She was motivated to "*contribute*" to her "*passion about international development*" (T1) & by the role that would allow her to "*use my [professional] skills to do some good & at the same time I'm training someone else, I'm mentoring*" (T1).

During her assignment, Samantha worked closely with two other volunteers hosted by the same PO. She says: "*We were a great team, we kept each other company with social things on the weekend.*" Samantha "*worked together a lot*" with one volunteer, in particular, who had more professional & international experience than Samantha ("*particularly in my role, she gave me a lot of ideas*", T2). This volunteer was especially supportive when Samantha began experiencing difficulties with activities of the PO manager & considered leaving the assignment prematurely. She recounted:

> *She had a lot more professional experience, so she probably was better equipped at dealing with [difficulties], in terms of leadership issues & stuff like that, than I probably was. She gave me a lot of support in terms of me standing up & actually saying that there's issues … I think if I had shown up in […] & I was the only volunteer, & being my first assignment & being much younger, & no one else was there to do it … I don't think I would have stayed. I think it would have ended much, much sooner* (T2)

The assignment gave Samantha personal confidence from "*living by myself for nine months from navigating all the challenges, whether it was being unwell or having to work out how to solve problems … you realise you can do more than what you thought you could*" (T3). Its biggest impact, she says, "*would be the confidence thing & the sense of adventure*" (T4). As she noted in 2021, it "*always goes back to the personal aspects of what I learned about myself … the experience of living in a different country*" (T3).

Although developing social or professional networks was not a major reason for volunteering initially, she is "*still connected*" (T4) with a volunteer she met at the PDB who is currently overseas but who she had "*caught up [with] every couple of months because he's actually the same age as me, so that's been really nice, so I actually got an actual friendship out of it as well, which has been really nice*" (T3). She also "*occasionally talks*" to another volunteer she met in-country, "*even though we live in different States … I still have those kind of connections*" (T4). She believes that:

> *… meeting other volunteers, particularly ones who have done other assignments, you get a much bigger picture of the program of what it's capable of. And also generally sharing experiences & that sense of understanding. The other volunteers are the only ones that are really going to know or really going to relate to you or understand you. I think without them you could feel a bit lost because you talk about your experience with people … & you know they're not understanding it, they're not really getting it. And I think with other volunteers, you can have that sense of understanding, which is really important* (T4)

As for the older volunteer "*mentor*" in her PO, after the assignment they "*exchange[d] messages"* regularly (T3) but contact has since declined. As Samantha explained it:

> *We kept in contact for a while. We've dropped off a bit. Nothing happened, it's just no-one's reached out. But definitely while we were on assignment it was a really good relationship & I probably would not have lasted as long if she wasn't there, because I would have been by myself & I wouldn't have really seen the point of being there, whereas she was a very good mentor … when we came back, we would email each other every couple of months, but then it is one of those sad things that happens, I think. I still have her email, so I probably will reach back out to her & see what she's doing, but it's just one of those things that just naturally happens – you drift apart* (T4)

6.5.2 Relationships with Partners and Families

Not commonly reported at T2 or T3, eight participants have found their experiences volunteering with an accompanying partner influenced their relationships in positive ways.[145] These encompass *Launchers* in relatively new relationships and *Veterans* in longer-term relationships with multiple volunteer assignments behind them.

The interview extracts below capture elements of the responses of these participants. On the whole, the shared memories created during the volunteer assignment and the support that each partner provided through the challenges of the assignment were viewed as strengthening the relationship. Some also identified the relative distance from other family and friends as contributing to this ("*because we only had each other and we didn't have the other commitments to do things*", #36), although one participant, whose biggest impact to date has been a stronger relationships with their partner and who has subsequently accepted another in-country assignment, noted that:

> *We're living in, mentally, a totally different space to the social systems we've got, [my HCN colleagues'] world is their family, their grandchildren, their connection to other family members and things. We've lost that to some extent, by volunteering, we're nowhere near as connected with our family as we would be if we stayed on in Australia* (#16)

For two participants, an evolution in personal beliefs and values – in both cases, directly linked to their deep immersion in the host culture – has fractured relationships with family members in Australia, at least temporarily. One described "*I think my friends have certainly seen the benefit … but my family is a bit different, they don't understand most of the things that I do … the sense that I wasn't that person and then I went to [the host country] and came back. I didn't talk about it as much, I suppose, especially in front of my parents because I didn't see the value in trying to knock off those barnacles of reactionary thought and try and get them to think about the world in a different way*" (#12). The other reported "*quite a big shift in perspective, it was a very impactful, intense experience and I think a lot of people who I was close with before that, I get the impression that they see me as quite boring now … so all the change I see as really positive, but not everyone around me has seen it that way*" (#43).

"It's a big part of our relationship. While it's not immediate, it's scaffolding, it's that sediment that sits on the bottom of the foundation of the relationship, I suppose" (#12)

"When we were volunteering [my partner] & I were more of a couple & I think that ever since we've had a baby we don't have as much time together. And we're like, how do we go back to those times when we were more of a team & we didn't just chronically survive & just look after the baby? So there's great things, I think, from volunteering because it really forces you to operate as a team" (#53)

"We'd already been together for quite a while. I guess maybe it strengthened it, the whole - getting out of there with COVID, because of COVID. That was certainly very stressful & that was nice to do it with her & not be, I guess, by yourself. That certainly would've been very stressful doing something like that by yourself. So that was nice. And I guess it's something that we can now, the whole thing of [the host country], we can look back on. That's nice to have someone to talk to about that, because that was a pretty special experience that we both had over there. So that's quite nice. But I'm not sure it's really changed our relationship in any way. We'll be reminded of things & talk about it. I think it happened a bit more recently, when we were overseas, just because we got reminded of seeing a […] down the street or something like that, where it's like yeah, that was like this" (#39)

"I reflect back on life as you get older & I look back on it with very fond memories. I think that I have been pretty blessed in life anyway. I am not a religious person, but it's another one of those blessings I had. I guess for [my partner] & I, we had nine months where I wasn't at the beck & call of the rest of the family. We just had each other & our times & I could go & do things. And I felt like I was making a difference & it was very rewarding" (#36)

"I think it changed our relationship in good ways & bad ways. He didn't love it as much as I did, so that was a bit of a strain. But I think in the long-term it is a pretty amazing experience that we did together, so I think it has really kind of strengthened that … there's few bits of [the host-country] language that we still use at home, not fully conversational but just terms & things like that which is really lovely. And every now & again, not that often because we don't have access to the same vegetables & things, but sometimes we'll cook [host-country] dishes & try to get the [host-country] beer, which is actually very hard to find" (#31)

6.6 Personal Circumstances and Capabilities: Key Findings and Emerging Implications

6.6.1 Key Findings

- The results add weight to the conclusions at T3 of the potential for participation in the program to contribute to positive personal changes in volunteers that come from the learning-intensive settings[146] in which they live and work, defined by challenge, novelty, relationships, and meaning. These changes vary greatly in intensity, from incremental to transformational and appear relatively stable despite major changes to some participants' lives unrelated to the program.
- Despite numerous participants encountering physical or emotional challenges during their volunteer assignments and following their 2020 repatriation, just three participants report residual negative impacts on their health. All three now work full-time, have taken steps to manage and improve their health and attribute beneficial outcomes to their experiences with the program.
- Participants now appear more aware of the contributions to their personal development (and volunteer experiences) made by the program's structure and support mechanisms that help them to form valued relationships and to benefit from the cultural novelty and challenges they experience. This includes some participants who had been critical of aspects of this previously. At the same time, the results again highlight the need for the right balance of challenge, novelty and meaning in participants' assignment structure and the support provided.
- An increasing number of participants identify a stronger relationship orientation (valuing relationships with family, friends and community) as a positive impact of their volunteer experiences resulting from their time in a different culture or the relative isolation of their assignment and repatriation experiences.
- Around half the sample report continuing to enact some change to their lifestyle provoked by their volunteer experiences, especially "health consciousness." A small number have introduced stronger spiritual or religious elements to their lives since T3 that they attribute to their exposure to religious practices or values experiences during their assignments.
- In the three years since participants' assignments were completed, the personal relationships that have remained most resilient are those with other volunteers. These are disparate but are most common and strongest among volunteers who shared a host country. For several, these relationships remain the central element of their experiences with the program.
- A diverse group of participants report their experiences volunteering having positive impacts on their relationships with their accompanying partners. The shared in-country experiences, including the interdependent support they offered each other, were the main reasons for this.

6.6.2 Emerging Implications

» Supporting Constructive Personal Changes and Outcomes

Two features of the personal changes reported at T4, but not earlier interviews, seem pertinent. First, although many participants were motivated by the possibility of adventure or personal fulfilment, few identified personal change as a primary goal or expected outcome of their assignment at T1. Yet some of the most substantial (and beneficial) changes to emerge appear to be personal (T4). Second, many of these personal changes are both transformational and sustained, suggesting these may be highly impactful on volunteers' lives, despite the prevalence of volunteers with pre-assignment motivations directed largely towards professional/career outcomes.

The results of T2 and T3, supported at T4, highlight the importance of challenge, meaning and dissonant experiences to foster these types of personal changes. Such experiences – both the instigating events and the outcomes - are especially conducive to reflection and sensemaking by learners. Despite this, some participants struggled to articulate or explain these changes, the impacts on their lives, and the types of experiences that nurtured these. While this was true of some professional changes also, it was much more apparent in participants' accounts of their personal development.

Although multiple reasons exist for this discrepancy, one explanation is that volunteers may have fewer opportunities to reflect on personal development than they do for other forms of change, such as professional development, for which frameworks are more commonly available and so more readily applied. It seems feasible, therefore, that personal change is one set of outcomes that may benefit most from tools such as structured frameworks to guide their reflections on their experiences as volunteers and on the assignment's impact on their personal development.[147]

Supporting this is the growing recognition that reflective practice[148] is critical to adult learning, particularly in the workplace.[149] Two different forms[150] could benefit volunteers. **Reflection-on-action** occurs after a

learning experience, when individuals deliberately contemplate what occurred, analyse their actions or performance, and identify areas for growth. This retrospective reflection encourages learners to extract meaningful insights and strategies to apply in future situations.[151]

Reflection-in-action, in contrast, involves adjusting and making decisions in the midst of an unfolding experience. This real-time reflection is crucial in dynamic work environments and in situations where people experience multiple transitions – such as those encountered by many program volunteers[152] - enabling people to adapt their approach as circumstances evolve and make sense of unfamiliar contexts and setting. Both forms of reflection can help to transform experiences into enduring knowledge and improved skills in ways that are professionally and personally valuable.[153]

In this, the emerging models of learning outcomes and change that the LSAV has identified – including **Table 10** and **Figure 11** for personal change – may have value as scaffolds that guide volunteers' reflections on their personal changes in ways that improve their sensemaking of the change itself and the situation/s in which the changes transpire.

In proposing this – and other learning-directed reflections suggested in this report - we caution against such activities distracting from volunteers' (and the program's) main purpose; namely, to support locally led capacity strengthening within POs. Our similar observations in 2021, therefore, remain valid. Nonetheless, relationships between reflective practice and work performance are well established[154] and so helping volunteers reflect on their practices and learning during and after their assignments is likely to enhance rather detract from their volunteer and post-assignment endeavours.

» Supporting Volunteers to Sustain Lifestyle Changes

The stability of the main lifestyle changes reported by some volunteers across multiple interviews is consistent with (mainly cross-sectional) studies that suggest international development volunteering can be the impetus for ongoing, not just temporary, prosocial changes in behaviour.[155] That these lifestyle changes have been relatively persistent despite the many extraneous changes that this sample has experienced since T1 makes the findings to date some of the strongest evidence available of the types of long-term personal changes enacted by volunteers in response to an international development volunteer assignment.

Participants' accounts of these changes suggest that some changes may be catalysed rather than instigated by the volunteer experience; that is, responses at both T3 and T4 suggest that a propensity or desire to enact some changes may predate a volunteer assignment. At the same time, the relative consistency of these changes over time and across volunteer types, and the clear links made by participants to particular in-country experiences (left of Figure 11), suggest that these conditions, which are central to the volunteer experience, are important stimuli if not inspiration for these changes. Volunteers' pre-assignment awareness of these – and an understanding of the common changes and conditions that are provoked - may make them more receptive to in-country role models, prompts or opportunities to begin enacting desired changes.

Also notable is the apparent delayed emergence of some lifestyle changes – such as 'priority to relationships'[156] and 'spirituality.' Past studies have shown that the accumulated impact of a series of incidents over time *during* a volunteer assignment can provoke gradual changes in volunteers' beliefs and values.[157] The findings reported here, however, may allude to a similar pattern of gradual evolution of values and acting on these *after* the assignment, with volunteers' continuing to draw on or recast assignment experiences as they make lifestyle decisions over extended periods. Some participants reporting these changes were strong in their view that the genesis of the change occurred in-country. However, to the extent that volunteer-volunteer relationships are underpinned by shared interests and values, it is possible that the close volunteer networks maintained by some participants since their assignment (Section 6.5) are, in fact, important fomenters or lubricants of lifestyle changes – not just during assignments but also after it. T4 interviews did not canvass this in detail. Given this pattern, however, it is a relationship that can be explored when discussing participants' lifestyle changes at T5.

Endnotes

[1] Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers: Phase One Inception Report (April 2019), Table 3, Section 3.4.4.

[2] More details regarding interpretative, longitudinal qualitative interviews as a research technique, including strengths and weaknesses of the approach, are included in the LSAV (Phase One) Inception Report (April 2019). Also see: Hermanowicz, J. C. (2013). The longitudinal qualitative interview, *Qualitative Sociology*, 36, 189-208; Saldaña, J. (2003). *Longitudinal Qualitative Research: Analyzing Change through Time*, Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira.

[3] The study's recruitment and engagement strategy is outlined in Section 3.2.1, Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers: Phase One Final Report (October 2019) and Section 3.4, Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers: Inception Report (April 2019).

[4] Section 3.2.3, Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers: Phase One Final Report (October 2019).

[5] The foundations of the interviews used at T4 mirrored those used in Phase Two and summarised in the table at Attachment 11, Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers 2019-2021: Final Report (April 2022).

[6] The classification of participants' biggest overall impact began with their T4 responses. At the group level, T2 and T3 responses were (re-)coded using the classifications derived at T4 to develop a consistent coding template. Individual participants' responses were traced to ensure participants explanations of the changes could be traced to their experiences reported at T2 and T3. There were no situations where responses were excluded. For the main contributions to these changes, classification started with T2 responses, where participants reported contemporaneous accounts of the most impactful experiences of their assignments. The categories used for this were reported in the report Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers 2019-2021: Final Report (April 2022). In both cases – main categories of impacts and main contributions to these – the most frequently cited responses across the sample are included. Data used for these classifications is from the just 50 respondents who participated at T4.

[7] Of the 16 participants identifying as male, three were classified as experiencing a 'large impact'; for female participants, this was 13/33. Eight of the 33 women reported 'professional' outcomes as the main impact of their assignment; for men, this was 2/16.

[8] Australian Volunteers Program Global Program Strategy 2018-2022.

[9] Interviews and analysis forming Section 3 of this report operationalized "civic engagement" using the same set of behaviours, attitudes and knowledge used in previous phases of the LSAV. Namely, participants': (i) involvement in community service and civics issues such as attending meetings or protests, raising or donating money, volunteering labour or skills, (ii) direct contributions to discussions or discourse on civics issues, such as posting to social media, overtly advocating for positions, making written submissions or raising issues for discussions in various community settings; and/or (iii) cognitive or emotional engagement in civics issues without necessarily acting upon this engagement. This includes monitoring media, reading or watching topical content, or informing oneself about issues relevant to international development (e.g., podcasts, online courses, perusing websites). The analysis includes participants' civic participation: (i) as individuals or as a part of a group; (ii) in structured settings (i.e. with a community organisation) or in unstructured and informal settings (e.g., helping neighbours); (iii) with a local, national or international focus, including remote and/or international volunteer assignments with the program or other volunteering agencies; (iv) outside their main paid work/employment. On the latter, although most civic engagement activities discussed here were undertaken voluntarily, analysis does include some activities that were not participants' primary source of income but for which some financial expenses were compensated (e.g., remote volunteering). Changes to participants' paid work roles and/or professional sector, including those involving a transition to a career with stronger prosocial concerns, are discussed in Section 5.

[10] The indicators used to identify participants' knowledge of and capabilities relating to the international development sector are identified in Figure 7, Section 3.5, of the Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers (2019-21): Final Report (April 2022).

[11] Participants whose civic participation activities at T4 were influenced by their involvement in the program: #01, #02, #03, #04, #08, #09, #14, #15, #16, #17, #22, #25, #27, #28, #30, #33, #40, #41, #43, #44, #45, #46, #48 and #54.

[12] Participants who sought out local volunteering roles enabling them to use cross-cultural skills that were developed during their assignment: #04, #05, #25, #32, #33 and #36.

[13] This includes participants undertaking formal international volunteering assignments (Section 3.4).

[14] Volunteers who had accepted voluntary roles as members of boards or executive committees for not-for-profit organisations: #03, #09, #22 and #31.

[15] Participants performing no voluntary service at T4 were: #07, #12, #18, #19, #20, #21, #23, #31, #35, #37, #39 and #50.

[16] Volunteers not currently involved in voluntary service who reported contributing through pro-social work roles: #07, #23, #35 and #37.

[17] The reasons for participants' non-involvement in voluntary service at T4 were: (i) demands of work or study: #07, #12, #18, #19, #35 and #39; (ii) personal or health issues: #23; and (iii) relocating to a new city: #20, #26 and #37.

[18] Participants whose civic participation activities indicate a general increase from T1 to T4: #01, #02, #04, #08, #14, #17, #22, #28, #40, #41, #44, #45 and #54.

[19] Participants whose civic participation activities indicate a general decline from T1 to T4: #10, #11, #12, #18, #19, #20, #21, #26, #27, #31, #35, #37, #39, #43 and #52.

[20] Excludes non-working partners (AADs).

[21] Ongoing contact with POs at T4 by volunteer type: *Launchers* (4/6, 67%), *Enhancers* (6/7, 86%), *Transitioners* (9/12, 75%), *Career Breakers* (3/3, 100%), *Imposed Transitioners* (5/7, 71%), *Veterans* (6/10, 60%).

[22] Of the 24 volunteers based in capital cities, 18 (75%) maintained some ongoing contact and six (25%) did not. For 21 volunteers based outside capital cities, 16 (76%) did whilst 5 (24%) did not.

[23] Thirty-eight volunteers were based in POs classified as 'local' (domestic NGOs or government agencies). Volunteers working in domestic NGOs had a slightly higher rate of ongoing contact (15/19, 79%) than those working for government agencies (14/19, 71%). These rates were not statistically different, and while the overall rate of 'local' PO ongoing contact (29/38, 76%) was higher than the level for those based in 'international' organisations (international NGO and multinational agencies): 71% (5/7), this difference was not statistically significant.

[24] PO staff turnover was most common in 'international' POs (i.e., INGOs and intergovernmental agencies).

[25] Volunteers who had undertaken a formal volunteer assignment with their PO between T3 and T4 and were still supporting them at T4 are: #03, #10, #17, #27, #28, #33 and #46. These include three *Veterans*, two *Launchers*, one *Enhancer* and one *Imposed Transitioner*.

[26] Volunteer types continuing to support POs at T4: *Enhancers* (5/7, 71%), *Imposed Transitioners* (3/7, 43%). These were also the groups whose ongoing support is the most substantial in terms of the quality of the support.

[27] Support for POs at T4: Unaccompanied by a partner during their assignment (14/33, 42%), accompanied by a partner (4/12, 33%).

[28] Ongoing support for POs at T4: Informal support = repatriated volunteers (14/32, 44%), non-repatriated volunteers (4/13, 31%); formal support = repatriated (6/32, 19%), non-repatriated (1/12, 8%).

[29] Ongoing support for POs at T4: Assignments with government agencies (9/19, 47%), assignments with internationally-focused POs (i.e., INGOs or intergovernmental agencies (3/7, 43%), assignments with domestic NGOs (6/19, 32%).

[30] Participants completing a remote volunteer assignment: #03, #06, #10, #17, #33, #40, #46 and #48. Participants completing a remote volunteer assignment in the same host country and with the PO: #03, #10, #17, #33, #46. Participants completing multiple remote volunteer assignments since T3: #17 and #48.

[31] Participants completing an in-country volunteer assignment: #15, #16, #19, #27, #28, #40, #49. Participants completing an in-country volunteer assignment in the same host country and with the PO: #19, #27 and #29.

[32] Nine of the 14 volunteers who undertook an assignment between T3 and T4 had worked in domestic NGOs. Interest in future international volunteer assignment at T4: Volunteers whose assignments were with: (i) domestic NGOs: looked for international volunteer assignments = 12/18, applied for international volunteer assignments = 11/18, (ii) government departments: looked for international volunteer assignments = 7/17, applied for international volunteer assignments = 3/17; (iii) international POs (INGOs and intergovernmental agencies): looked for international volunteer assignments = 4/7, applied for international volunteer assignments = 3/7.

[33] Interest in future international volunteer assignment at T4: Volunteers accompanied by a partner: 8/12 (67%), not accompanied by a partner (16/33, 48%). 'Accompanied' volunteers also sought out and accepted assignments at a higher rate than unaccompanied volunteers.

[34] Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers: Phase Two Final Report (December 2020), Section 4.3 and EndNote 92.

[35] Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers (2019-21): Final Report (April 2022), Section 3.5 and Figure 7.

[36] Participants reporting lower levels of civic engagement: #10, #11, #26, #30, #35, #36, #40, #43, #46. Participants reporting no civic engagement: #26, #30, #36, #40 and #43.

[37] Participants reporting ongoing active monitoring of international development issues: #02, #04, #08, #09, #14, #15, #16, #19, #23, #27, #29, #31, #37 and #53. Participants who are interested in and engage with international development issues without actively seeking it out regularly: #05, #17, #21, #24, #39, #45 and #48. Participants who reporting accessing information about international development issues mainly via former volunteers and friends: #07, #11, #28 and #29.

[38] All seven *Enhancers* remain cognitive engaged in international development; five of these strongly.

[39] Participants working in international development roles from Australia or abroad at T4 are: #02, #14, #19, #27, #29, #37 and #53. Participants undertaking international development volunteer assignments are: #15, #16, #40, #48 and #49.

[40] Participants showing strong international development engagement who work in the sector: #02, #09, #14, #27, #29, #37 and #53. Participants showing strong international development engagement who are not working in the sector but who expressed interest in doing so in the future: #08, #19 and #35.

[41] Participants identifying support for and appreciation of development volunteering as the biggest impact of their volunteer assignment: #25 and #33.

[42] Participants identifying improved understanding of international aid and development as the biggest impact of their volunteer experience are #14 and ##39.

[43] Examples of participants: (i) expressing ongoing misgivings about inequalities in international development practice = #09 and #35; (ii) questioning the efficacy of international development = #03, #05, #35 and #49; (iii) expressing concerns about structural features relating to funding or (lack of) cooperation in international development = #16, #24, #36 and #48.

[44] Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers: Phase Two Final Report (December 2020), Section 3.5 and 3.6.3.

[45] Participants reporting an ongoing strong interest in decolonization and the need for locally-led development that was instigated by their involvement with the program: #03, #04, #07, #08, #10, #14, #20, #46 and #53.

[46] Participants reporting an ongoing strong interest in geopolitical issues of aid and development that was instigated by their involvement with the program: #01, #03, #10, #23, #24, #26, #31, #39, #44 and #45.

[47] These outcomes are identified in Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers (2019-21): Final Report (April 2022), Section 3.5 and Figure 7.

[48] Participants who reported applying "international development" literacy to their work: #05, #09, #14, #19, #23, #24, #26, #28, #29, #30, #37 and #53. Participants who reported applying "international development" literacy to their voluntary service (civic participation): #04, #05, #06, #08, #15, #16, #22, #25, #29, #30, #33, #40, #44, #45, #46 and #48.

[49] Participants: #03, #09, #22 and #46.

[50] In this and other sections reporting implications we use the term "volunteers" broadly to include all participants of the program, including *Non-working partners*.

[51] Studies estimate a combined loss of over 12 million volunteer hours across Australia per week during the two years of the COVID pandemic. The rates of volunteering have not returned to their pre-COVID levels. Sources: Biddle, N., Boyer, C., Gray, M. & Jahromi, M. (2022) Volunteering in Australia: The Volunteer Perspective. Volunteering Australia; Biddle, N. & Gray, M. (2020). The experience of volunteers during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, ANU Centre for Social Research & Methods. May 2020; Volunteering Australia (2020). Reengaging volunteers and COVID-19.

[52] It is worth noting that the changing pattern towards SBIO volunteering likely reflect other changes in participants' lives – e.g., the rise in skills-based volunteering among *Launchers* is consistent with shifts from university to professional stages of their careers.

[53] We raised this point at T3 – see Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers (2019-21): Final Report (April 2022), Section 3.6.3.

[54] Fee, A. 2023, 'International development volunteers: A potential source of global experience, knowledge and enterprise', Volunteering Australia, Volunteering Research Papers Initiative.

[55] See Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers: Phase Two Final Report (December 2020) and Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers (2019-21): Final Report (April 2022),

[56] At T3, the behaviours of 20/54 (37%) participants were classified as highly engaged with the host country, region, and/or both. Two of these did not participate in T4 interviews. The 18 participants highly engaged at T3 were: **#01, #02, #04, #09,** #12**, #19,** #23**, #24**, **#27**, **#28, #33,** #40, #42, **#45, #48, #49,** #52 and **#53**. The 13 who remained highly engaged at T4 are listed in bold.

[57] Four *Launchers* (67%) and four *Enhancers* (57%) were classified as having high levels of engagement with the host country and/or region at T4. Five *Launchers* (83%) and five *Enhancers* (71%) were evaluated as sustaining or increasing engagement since T3.

[58] Seven of the 10 *Veterans* were evaluated as declining engagement with the host country or region between T3 and T4, all from 'moderate' or 'high' levels of engagement.

[59] Participants who reported using Australian High Commission or Embassy social feeds as an ongoing source of host-country information: #03, #07, #09, #27, #28, #31, #44, #49 and #57.

[60] Participants who returned to the host country between T3 and T4 for work or pleasure are: #02, #07, #09, #19, #26, #27, #28, #45 and #46. By way of comparison, ten participants reported travelling to other countries (not their host country) for work or pleasure during the same period: #09, #06, #12, #15, #16, # 32, #36, #37, #39, #40 and #49.

[61] Participants reporting a desire to return to the host country to work at T3 were: #19, #27, #28, #46 and #54. Participant #19 worked in the host country in 2021-22, before returning to Australia. Participant #27 remained in the host country at T4.

[62] Participants expressing plans to travel to the host country in 2023: #03, #24 and #41.

[63] One of these participants advised via email that they had visited the host country on vacation in early 2024 (#44).

[64] Participants identifying culture-general knowledge and capabilities as the biggest impact of their volunteer assignment are: #03, #04, #16, #17, #21, #22, #31, #32 and #39.

[65] Participants identifying host-country knowledge and capabilities as the biggest impact of their volunteer experience are: #01, #07, #31 and #49.

[66] Participants whose activities and work reflect expertise or specialisation in the host country or host region at T4: #01, #02, #04, #05, #09, #19, #35, #37, #41 and #45.

[67] Participants who reported using their cultural acumen in their work directly with refugees and/or migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds are: #04, #07, #09, #25, #35 and #45. Participants who reported using their cultural acumen in their work with Indigenous Australian colleagues and clients are: #01, #02, #04, #05, #35 and #39.

[68] Participants who reported benefits of their cross-cultural capabilities when taking on subsequent remote or in-country volunteer assignments or when relocating abroad: #02, #15, #16, #29, #33, #37, #40 and #48.

[69] Network theorists differentiate between interpersonal networks based on: (i) their relative strength ("weak" or "strong" ties) according to whether the relationship is more psychologically distant/close and require less/more investment of energy and resources, and (ii) who those networks connect – people who share similar demographic characteristics ("bonding capital") or more expansive outward-focused ties with those who differ in identity or profession ("bridging capital"). See, for example, Gittell, R. & Vidal, A. (1998). *Community Organizing: Building Social Capital as a Development Strategy*. Sage; Granovetter, M.S. (1973). The strength of weak ties. *American Journal of Sociology*, 78(6), 1360-1380; Putnam, R.D. (2000). *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. Simon and Schuster.

[70] Participants sustaining strong ongoing contact with host-country nationals are participants: #01, #02, #09, #19, #24, #26, #28, #45 and #46.

[71] Participants identifying relationships with HCNs as the biggest impact of their volunteer experience are: #09, #26, #29, #33 and #46.

[72] Participants with no ongoing contact with host-country nationals are participants: #06, #07, #10, #12, #16, #20, #25, #32, #36, #38, #42 and #50.

[73] Participants reporting that they continue to nurture and benefit from close expatriate networks: #01, #02, #10, #19, #28, #31, #35, #37, #40, #46, #52, #53 and #54.

[74] Participants reporting strong connections with one or more expatriates at T4: #02, #19, #31, #37, #46, #53 and #54.

[75] Participants reporting losing contact with formerly close expatriate networks between T3 and T4: #05, #11, #15, #32, #33 and #44.

[76] Participants reporting no ongoing connections with either expatriates or HCNs are: #06, #07, #16, #18, #20, #25, #36, #38, #42 and #50.

[77] Australian Volunteers Program Global Program Strategy 2018-2022.

[78] For example, the model is consistent with the apparent value of volunteers' pre-existing host-country knowledge, capabilities and interest to HCN connections – see Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers (2019-21): Final Report (April 2022), Section 4.2.1. It also offers an explanation for some participants' renewed connections with POs that were previously foregone.

[79] Research supporting the connections between cross-cultural competence and better quality intercultural contact is abundant and longstanding across a range of contexts and conditions (see, for example, Kim, Y. (2001). *Becoming intercultural: An integrative theory of communication and intercultural communication*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage). While the link between possessing and applying cross-cultural competence is more equivocal, most of this research supports the view that increased intercultural self-efficacy and confidence operate in conjunction with other components of cultural competence to encourage the enactment of these behaviours; see, for example: Ang, S., Van Dyne, L., Koh, C., Ng, K.Y., Templer, K. J., Tay, C., & Chandrasekar, N.A. (2007). Cultural intelligence: Its measurement and effects on cultural judgment and decision making, cultural adaptation and task performance. *Management and organization Review*, *3*(3), 335-371; Chiu, C.Y., Lonner, W.J., Matsumoto, D., & Ward, C. (2013). Cross-cultural competence: Theory, research, and application. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 44(6), 843-848.

[80] Although different definitions of reflective practice exist, in general it involves the critical examination of one's experiences, actions, and thought processes, leading to deeper understanding and continuous improvement. See, for example, Schön, D.A. (1995). *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*. Arena.

[81] See, for example: Dane, E. (2024). Promoting and supporting epiphanies in organizations: A transformational approach to employee development. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 180, 104295; Faller, P., Lundgren, H., & Marsick, V. (2020). Overview: Why and how does reflection matter in workplace learning? *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, 22(3), 248-263.

[82] Justice, S. B., Bang, A., Lundgren, H., Marsick, V. J., Poell, R. F., & Yorks, L. (2020). Operationalizing reflection in experience-based workplace learning: A hybrid approach. *Human Resource Development International*, *23*(1), 66-87; Kowalski, R., & Russell, C. (2020). How we see is how we learn: Reflection in the workplace. *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, *22*(3), 239-247.

[83] Hopwood (2014) identifies time, bodies, spaces and objects as critical aspects of learning in work settings, and all as important to fully understand learning at and for work. All four features (time, bodies, spaces and objects) are evident in the learning accounts reported by participants at T2-T4. Source: Hopwood, N. (2014). Four essential dimensions of workplace learning. *Journal of Workplace Learning*, 26(6), 349-363.

[84] For instance, the use of artefacts and objects can act as anchors, grounding abstract concepts or disparate experiences in concrete, multisensory terms. Source: Enang, E., Sminia, H., Gherardi, S., & Zhang, Y. (2023). Unpacking researchers' embodied sensemaking: A diffractive reading-writing of Mann Gulch disaster. *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, 39(4), 101299.

[85] Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers (2019-21): Final Report (April 2022), Section 4.5.2.

[86] See, for instance, the box on page 36 "Alumni volunteers who have returned to the host country – An untapped resource?"

[87] Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers: Phase One Final Report (October 2019), Section 4.1.

[88] Several studies in Australia and elsewhere highlight the career/professional motives of international development volunteers. These include: Brook, J., Missingham, B., Hocking, R. & Fifer, D. (2007). *The Right Person for the Job: International Volunteering and the Australian Employment Market*. Monash Institute for the Study of Global Movements & Australian Volunteers International, Monash University; Meneghini, A. M. (2016). A meaningful break in a flat life: The motivations behind overseas volunteering. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 45(6), 1214-1233; Okabe, Y., Shiratori, S. & Suda, K. (2019). What motivates Japan's international volunteers? Categorizing Japan overseas cooperation volunteers (JOCVs). *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 30(5), 1069-1089. Schech, S., Skelton, T., Mundkur, A. & Kothari, U. (2020). International volunteerism and capacity development in nonprofit organizations of the global south. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 49(2), 252-271.

[89] This considers on professional/career work and does not consider the financial costs and benefits of their assignments. As Section 6.4 shows, several participants believe that are less financially secure because of their involvement in the program. See the box 'Financial insecurity before and after international volunteering'.

[90] Participants working in roles not directly related to their preferred profession at T3 were #11, #12, #20, #21 and #27. The participant working in a role not directly related to their preferred profession at T4 was #42.

[91] Participants working part-time at T3 were #04, #11, #27, #35 and #37. Participants working part-time at T4 were #04, #05, #37, #41 and #45.

[92] Participants seeking careers with a strong international focus to their career at T1: #01, #07, #08, #09, #12, #14, #19, #20, #21, #23, #24, #26, #27, #29, #35, #37, #39, #40, #43, #45, #52 and #54.

[93] Participants identifying career benefits as the biggest impact of their volunteer experience are: #08, #12, #20, #37, #53 and #54. All are *Launchers*, *Enhancers* or *Transitioners*.

[94] Participants whose careers have benefitted from their experiences on the program: (i) Has benefitted career and had expected or hoped it would: #01, #02, #03, #08, #09, #12, #14, #19, #20, #23, #27, #28, #29, #31, #37, #39, #40, #46, #52 and #53. (ii) Has benefitted career although had not expected it to: #04, #05, #17, #21, #43 and #54.

[95] (i) Participants whose career benefits were unambiguously positive: #01, #02, #04, #05, #08, #09, #14, #17, #19, #21, #23, #27, #28, #37, #40, #46, #53 and #54. (ii) Participants whose career benefits were equivocal: #03, #12, #20, #29, #31, #39, #43 and #52.

[96] The nine participants who had expected or hoped at T1 that their involvement with the program would help their career but have yet to realise a tangible benefit are: #11, #24, #26, #35, #36, #41, #42 and #45.

[97] Participants #01, #04, #07, #08, #11, #14, #19, #20, #23, #24, #26, #27, #29, #35, #37, #52, #53 and #54. Includes only participants form whom T4 data is available.

[98] For more reading on volunteering as prosocial action see: Snyder, M. & Omoto, A.M. (2009). Who gets involved and why? The psychology of volunteerism. In Liu, E.S.C, Holosko, M.J. & Lo, T.W. (Eds). *Youth Empowerment and Volunteerism: Principles, Policies and Practices* (pp. 3-26). City University of Hong Kong Press. For more reading on

prosocial careers see: Duffy, R. D. & Raque-Bogdan, T.L. (2010). The motivation to serve others: Exploring relations to career development. *Journal of Career Assessment,* 18(3), 250-265.

[99] Participants #02, #03, #09, #30, #31, #39, #40, #45 and #46.

[100] Participants who had sought (at T1) and who had achieved (by T3) a prosocial transition were: #02, #03, #04, #08, #09, #19, #23, #37, #40, #46 and #54. Includes only participants for whom T4 data is available.

[101] Participants who had sought (at T1) and who had achieved (by T4) a prosocial transition were: #02, #04, #07, #08, #09, #14, #23, #24, #27, #28, #29, #35, #37, #40, #45, #46, #53 and #54. Includes only participants form whom T4 data is available.

[102] An additional five *Veterans* who had not expressed prosocial career motivations at T1 were also working in full-time roles with strong prosocial orientations at T4 – all were now completing full-time volunteer assignments: #05, #15, #16, #48 and #49. Includes only participants form whom T4 data is available.

[103] Prosocial career seekers who had not achieved their T1 objectives of transitioning to a prosocial role at T4: #01, #03, #11, #19, #20, #24, #26, #30, #31, #39 and #52.

[104] Cao, J., & Hamori, M. (2022). Adapting careers to the COVID crisis: The impact of the pandemic on employees' career orientations. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 139, 103789.

[105] The 13 participants who reported having accrued benefits since T3 from the professional networks that they made during their assignment were: #01, #02, #12, #19, #24, #28, #35, #37, #40, #41, #46, #53 and #54. Of these, the six participants reporting substantial professional benefits were: #01, #02, #12, #19, #37 and #53. The benefits reported by the other seven were classified as more moderate (e.g., job opportunities that they chose not to pursue): #24, #28, #35, #40, #41, #46 and #53.

[106] The following participants reporting professional benefits from: (i) expatriates (#12, #35, #37, #40, #46, #53 and #54), (ii) HCNs (#01, #24, #28, #40, #41 and #54), (iii) Australians (#02, #19 and #46).

[107] The six participants reporting substantial professional benefits were: #01, #02, #12, #19, #37 and #53.

[108] Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers: Phase Two Final Report (December 2020), Section 4.2.

[109] Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers (2019-21): Final Report (April 2022), Section 5.3.

[110] Two minor changes to the classifications used at T3 have been deployed in this report: (i) Because fewer participants identified “communication skills” than in prior interviews, these responses have been amalgamated within the category “role performance and management capabilities”, and (ii) accounts of “professional confidence” were more common and were identified by participants from five of the seven volunteer types. For this reason, “professional confidence” is included as a stand-alone category.

[111] Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers: Phase Two Final Report (December 2020), Sections 4.2.2 and 4.2.3, and Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers (2019-21): Final Report (April 2022), Attachment 10.

[112] Some participants reported substantial professional development in multiple outcome categories. These have been counted multiple times in the tables.

[113] The thirteen participants identifying enhanced professional knowledge and capabilities as the biggest outcome of their volunteer experience to date are: #02, #08, #09, #12, #14, #19, #20, #23, #24, #28, #37, #40 and #54. The ten of these participants who identified cultural proficiency (either culture-general or culture-specific) as professional important are: #02, #08, #09, #12, #14, #19, #20, #23, #28 and #37.

[114] Participants who reported applying ‘culture-general knowledge and capabilities’ from their assignment in their current work are: #01, #02, #03, #04, #05, #06, #08, #09, #12, #14, #15, #16, #19, #21, #23, #25, #27, #29, #31, #35, #37, #39, #40, #43, #44, #45, #46, #48 and #53. Participants who reported applying ‘culture-specific knowledge and capabilities’ from their assignment in their current work are: #01, #02, #19, #37 and #41.

[115] Participants who reported applying ‘mentoring’ capabilities from their assignment in their current work are: #03, #04, #15, #17, #19, #35, #43 and #46. Participants who reported applying ‘capacity development’ capabilities from their assignment in their current work are: #09, #15, #24, #28 and #29.

[116] Participants who reported applying ‘mentoring’ capabilities from their assignment in their current work are: (i) leadership and managing change - #03, #09, #23, #28, #29, #43 and #52, (ii) managing interpersonal relationships - #06, #16, #24 and #31, (iii) communicating - #11, #23, #24 and #27, (iv) managing projects - #45.

[117] Enhanced domain-specific knowledge and capabilities were reported by 23 participants at T3: #01, #04, #08, #09, #10, #17, #19, #20, #23, #26, #28, #29, #31, #33, #35, #37, #39, #40, #42, #46, #48, #53 and #54. At T4, 14 participants reported benefitting from domain-specific knowledge and capabilities developed during their assignment: #01, #08, #09, #14, #19, #20, #23, #26, #31, #37, #38, #40, #53 and #54.

[118] Excluding participants who had no opportunities to apply professional capabilities, the average number of examples provided by each volunteer type is: *Launchers*: 2.5, *Enhancers*: 3, *Transitioners*: 1.6, *Career Breakers*: 1.6, *Imposed Transitioners*: 1.8, *Veterans*: 1.6, *Non-working Partners*: 0.5.

[119] Marsick, V.J. & Watkins, K. (1990). *Informal and Incidental Learning in the Workplace*. Routledge; Stasz, C. (2001). Assessing skills for work: Two perspectives. *Oxford Economic Papers*, 3, 385-405.

[120] Some participants reported making applications for multiple professional opportunities (e.g., applying for a job and a committee membership).

[121] While the assessments by participants about the impact of their assignment during job applications are largely subjective, those reporting benefits in the application process did also report stronger career benefits (T3 and T4) and developing more valuable professional networks (T4). They also tended to hold stronger career-related motivations for their assignment (T1).

[122] Three other participants were unsure whether their volunteer experiences were perceived favourably or unfavourably by those assessing their application.

[123] Responses on the accuracy of pre-assignment position descriptions (PDs) were available from 36 participants: nine reported generally accurate PDs, 27 reported generally inaccurate PDs. Others chose not to, or were unable to, comment. Of the 36 responses, 6/9 reporting accurate PDs reported that their volunteer assignment was strongly beneficial when seeking employment. For those reporting inaccurate PDs, 7/27 reported strong benefits.

[124] Examples of participants whose volunteer experiences were beneficial during applications for jobs, promotions or volunteer positions: (i) demonstrating cross-cultural acumen: #01, #07, #17, #19, #20, #21, #23, #25, #40 and #41, (ii) experiences working in different and/or challenging contexts: #03, #14, #27, #42 and #54, (iii) sector experience: #03, #09, #19, #27, #40 and #43.

[125] The 12 participants inspired to commence formal study by their assignment (at T3) came from all seven volunteer types: #02 #03, #06, #08, #11, #20, #28, #33, #37, #43, #46 and #54. One additional participant who reported being inspired to pursue a program of study at T3 did not participate at T4 (#51).

[126] The ten participants reporting tangible professional benefits from studies that were inspired by their volunteer assignment (T4) were: #02, #03, #06, #08, #20, #28, #33, #43, #46 and #54. Of these, two did not complete their degrees but found the knowledge gained valuable for a job application (#06) and work role (#46). One completed the program of study but has not yet benefitted professionally (#37). Participant #11 discontinued the studies without benefit, although may return to future studies in the future.

[127] Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers (2019-21): Final Report (April 2022), Section 5.3.3.

[128] The 10 participants who reported that their volunteer assignment had consolidated or extended previous studies were: #01, #12, #19, #20, #27, #29, #33, #35, #37 and #54. One additional participant who reported that their volunteer assignment had consolidated or extended previous studies at T3 did not participate at T4 (#51).

[129] The six participants who reported that their volunteer assignment had consolidated or extended previous studies and who identified career/professional outcomes as the main impact of their volunteer assignment were: #12, #19, #20, #29, #37 and #54.

[130] Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers: Phase Two Final Report (December 2020), Sections 4.2.2 and 4.2.3.

[131] While generally viewed as highly portable, studies have shown challenges transferring 'soft skills' across sector, context and culture. See: Feldman, D.C. & Thomas, D.C. (1992). Career management Issues facing expatriates. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 23(2), 271-293; Pea, R.D. (1987). Socializing the knowledge transfer problem. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 11(6), 639-663; Royer, J.M. (1979). Theories of the transfer of learning. *Educational Psychologist*, 14, 53-69.

[132] For earlier accounts of this issue see: Brook, J., Missingham, B., Hocking, R. & Fifer, D. (2007). *The Right Person for the Job: International Volunteering and the Australian Employment Market*. Monash Institute for the Study of Global Movements & Australian Volunteers International, Monash University; Thomas, G. (2002), *Human Traffic: Skills, Employers and International Volunteering*, London: Demos.

[133] Participants reporting major medical issues during their assignments at T2: #01, #06, #07, #10, #13, #14, #22, #23, #25, #26, #27, #28, #29, #32, #33, #36, #38, #40, #41, #42, #43, #45, #47 and #49. Participants who reported using *Response Psychological* during their assignment (T2): #08, #14, #29, #42 and #47. For details, see: Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers: Phase Two Final Report (December 2020). Participants reporting major health issues at T3 as a result of either their assignment or the post-assignment adjustment during COVID: #07, #12, #14, #20, #21, #28, #29, #41, #42, #45, #46 and #52. For details, see Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers (2019-21): Final Report (April 2022), Section 6.3.2.

[134] Twenty participants identified personal development as the biggest impact to date of their volunteer assignment at T4. Four others identified personal development along with other changes. These are: #04, #06, #10, #11, #15, #16, #18, #22, #27, #30, #31, #33, #35, #36, #41, #42, #43, #44, #45, #46, #48, #50, #52 and #53.

[135] Example traits attached to each of the six forms of personal development identified at T3 are: (1) Confidence: Self-confidence, independence, self-sufficiency, (2) Acceptance (easy going): More relaxed, willing to go with the flow, accepting imperfections, contentment and calmness, stressing less over minor issues outside one's control, accepting when things do not go to plan, (3) Satisfaction: Pride, happiness, accomplishments, life satisfaction, achievement, meaning, (4) Self-awareness: Awareness of strengths and weaknesses, recognising work or personal preferences and aspirations, awareness of one's position in society, awareness of what makes one happy, (5) Resilience: Coping with stress, dealing with change, overcoming challenges, (6) Cosmopolitanism: Openness to others, accepting different ways of life and world views. More details can be found in Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers (2019-21): Final Report (April 2022), Section 6.2 and Figure 16.

[136] Examples of participants who attributed each of the six personal development outcomes to their assignments at T4: Increased self-confidence: #06, #11, #19, #37 and #53. Greater satisfaction: #29, #36 and #39. Increased resilience: #09, #14 and #30. Increased cosmopolitanism: #03, #04, #35, #37 and #54. Increased self-awareness: #29 and #30. Greater acceptance: #07, #11 and #29.

[137] Ten participants identified appreciation for relationships (family and friends) as a personal change arising from their experiences volunteering: #04, #06, #08, #09, #14, #20, #29, #31, #37 and #46.

[138] See Attachment 10, and also Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers (2019-21): Final Report (April 2022), Section 6.2 and Figure 16. The two conditions reported most commonly at T3 and T4 were "challenge" (reported at T4 by -#06, #07, #09, #11, #14, #23, #28, #29, #30, #31, #39 and #40), and "novelty" (reported at T4 by #03, #05, #07, #09, #16, #20, #22, #23, #32, #43, #49 and #54). While several participants identified general connections they made as important contributors to their personal development, three focused on access to people with different views (including different age groups): #15, #29 and #32.

[139] Contributors to the personal change 'relationships' are drawn from just T4 data.

[140] As with T3, the data in this section draw on participants' own interpretation of questions relating to their lifestyle (and changes to it), how any changes manifest, and the ways that their involvement in the program may have contributed to these. We therefore rely on their (typically quite broad) interpretations of "lifestyle." In discussing this topic, most participants who identified changed lifestyles focused on new routines, practices or general re-orientations that they had made to a part of their day-to-day life and which they believed resulted from their assignments. As with responses at T3, most were clear about the attitudes that informed these changes and the bases for these.

[141] Participants reporting each of the six categories of lifestyle change are: At T3: (i) **Health conscious – T3:** #04, #07, #09, #20, #25 and #37; **T4:** #07, #20, #24, #25, #27, #31, #38, #43 and #45; (ii) **Priority to relationships – T3**: #01, #09, #20, #37, #43 and #46; **T4:** #06, #08, #14, #31 and #37; (iii) **Environment and sustainability – T3:** #11, #18, #25, #35, #43 and #46; **T4:** #10, #35 and #46; (iv) **Anti-consumption – T3:** #05, #10, #12, #18, #21, #30, #34 and #42; **T4:** #05, #10, #21, #26, #30, #32, #49 and #53; (v) **Work-life balance – T3:** #02, #06, #26, #39, #49 and #53; **T4:** #37 and #46; (vi) **Other – T3:** #31, #33 and #40; **T4:** #02, #04, #09, #14, #29 and #43. These results exclude participants who did not participate at T4.

[142] See Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers (2019-21): Final Report (April 2022), Section 6.3 ('Research note: Interpreting the impact of a volunteer assignment (and COVID) on lifestyle changes').

[143] Participants identifying other volunteers as among their strongest friendships at T4: #07, #20, #27, #37, #42, #46, #52, #53 and #54.

[144] Participants identifying new friendships with other volunteers as the biggest impact of their volunteer assignment: #27, #37 and #52.

[145] Participants reporting that the volunteer assignment strengthened their relationships with their partners: #15, #16, #12, #21, #31, #36, #39 and #53.

[146] The idea of learning-intensive environments, mainly within work contexts, was raised in the report: Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers (2019-21): Final Report (April 2022), Section 6.5.2. Also see: Fuller, A. & Unwin, L. (2004). Expansive learning environments: Integrating organizational and personal development. In H. Rainbird, A. Fuller & A. Munro (Eds). *Workplace Learning in Context* (pp. 126-144). Routledge; Skule, S. (2004). Learning conditions at work: A framework to understand and assess informal learning in the workplace. *International Journal of Training and Development*, 8(1), 8-20; van Gelderen, M., van der Sluis, L. & Jansen, P. (2005). Learning opportunities and learning behaviours of small business starters: Relations with goal achievement, skill development and satisfaction. *Small Business Economics*, 25(1), 97-108.

[147] Justice, S. B., Bang, A., Lundgren, H., Marsick, V. J., Poell, R. F., & Yorks, L. (2020). Operationalizing reflection in experience-based workplace learning: A hybrid approach. *Human Resource Development International*, *23*(1), 66-87.

[148] Although different definitions of reflective practice exists, in general it involves the critical examination of one's experiences, actions, and thought processes, leading to deeper understanding and continuous improvement. See, for example, Schön, D. A. (1995). *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*. Arena.

[149] Faller, P., Lundgren, H., & Marsick, V. J. (2020). Overview: Why and how does reflection matter in workplace learning, *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, *00*(0), 1-16.

[150] Schön, D. A. (1995). *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*. Arena.

[151] Boud, D., Keogh, R., & Walker, D. (2013). *Reflection: Turning Experience into Learning*. Routledge.

[152] Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers: Phase Two Final Report (December 2020), Section 3.2.1.

[153] Marsick, V. J., & Watkins, K. (2015). *Informal and Incidental Learning in the Workplace (Routledge revivals)*. Routledge.

[154] Schön, D. A. (1995). *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*. Arena

[155] Starr, J.M. (1994). Peace Corps service as a turning point. *The International Journal of Aging and Human Development*, 39(2), 137-161; Tiessen, R., Cassin, K. & Lough, B.J. (2021). International development volunteering as a catalyst for long-term prosocial behaviours of returned Canadian volunteers. *Citizenship Teaching & Learning*, 16(1), 95-114.

[156] Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers (2019-21): Final Report (April 2022), Section 6.3 ('Research note: Interpreting the impact of a volunteer assignment (and COVID) on lifestyle changes').

[157] Fee, A. & Gray, S.J. (2011). Fast-tracking expatriate development: The unique learning environments of international volunteer placements. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, *22*(03), 530-552; Fee A. & Gray S.J. (2013). Transformational learning experiences of international development volunteers in the Asia--Pacific: The case of a multinational NGO. *Journal of World Business*, 48(2), 196-208.

List of Attachments

Number	Attachment	Report section
1	Initial sample and assignment composition at T1	Section 2.3
2	Key features of participants by volunteer category, partner organisation, and individual details (T4)	Section 2.3
3	Participant characteristics (T4)	Section 2.3
4	Research overview and sample interview schedule (T4)	Section 2.4
5	Summary of seven volunteer types	Section 2.4
6	Illustrative changing patterns of engagement with host countries from T3 to T4	Section 4.2
7	Illustrative changing patterns of contact with expatriate communities (T2-T4)	Section 4.4.2
8	Reported learning outcomes by category, context and cause at T2	Section 5.3.1
9	Two models showing the relationships between international volunteering and formal study (T3)	Section 5.3.2
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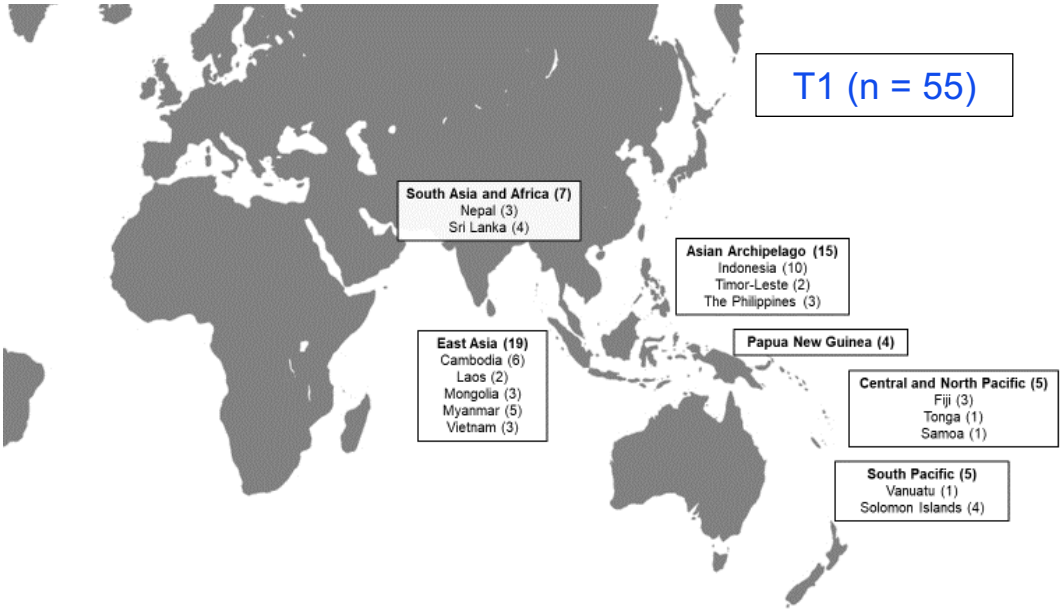
Initial sample and assignment composition at T1

Details of the 55 participants who commenced the study in 2019 and the assignments they completed can be found in the *Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers: Phase One Final Report* (October 2019). In short:

- Participants' ages at pre-departure ranged from 22 to 74 years (mean: 42.9 years), with larger representation among young and elderly participants. Sixty-four percent (35/55) were female; one participant indicated 'prefer to self-describe' as their gender identity. The largest proportion of participants identified as being 'Australian (Other)' (36/55). Other national identities (by ancestry) reported by participants included Scottish, Chinese, French, Australian Aboriginal, Irish, Malaysian, German, Italian, Welsh and English. Six participants (11%) reported being from homes in which a language other than English (LOTE) is spoken. Three (5%) reported having a disability.
- Participants were drawn from all Australian States and Territories, with the largest proportion being from New South Wales (20/55, 36% of participants) and Victoria (13/55, 24% of participants). Queensland, which comprises 9% of the sample and 20% of the Australian population, and South Australia (4% and 7%) had the lowest representation in terms of sample composition compared with Australia's population distribution. Ten participants (18%), including five from New South Wales, reported living in non-urban areas of Australia (i.e. regional/rural).
- Ninety-five percent of the initial participants (52/55) held either a bachelor degree (25/55, 45%) or masters/doctorate degree (27/55, 49%). The largest occupational categories represented were Education/Training/Library and Business/Marketing/Tourism/Art & Design (both 18% of the sample), and Community/Social Development (13%). Participants' work experience in their occupational category varied from nil to 41 years (mean: 13.99 years).
- Participants' assignments were hosted in all six geographic regions and 16 of the 26 countries in which the program operates, primarily 'East Asia' (19/55 assignments, or 35%) and 'Asian Archipelago' (15/55 assignments, or 27%). 'Government agencies' (22 assignments) and 'domestic NGOs' (20 assignment) comprise a total of 84% of the 50 assignments being undertaken by the participants. The figure below shows the geographic distribution of assignments by country and region.
- Comparisons between the assignments undertaken by the study's initial participants and other assignments revealed no significant differences in relation to assignment duration or partner organisation type. A halt on assigning volunteers to Africa[1] was in place at the time participants for this study were recruited, meaning that none of the sample were deployed to Africa, a region hosting 10% of the program's volunteers.[2]



[1] Volunteer assignments were temporarily halted while DFAT confirmed geographic priority locations of the program.

[2] Based on data provided by program staff for all program assignments during financial year 2018-19; 97/1017 assignments in Africa, comprising: Republic of South Africa (57), Tanzania (28), eSwantini (7) and Lesotho (6).

Attachment 2

Key features of participants by volunteer category, partner organisation, and individual details (T4)

VOLUNTEER CATEGORY	PARTNER ORGANISATION DETAILS						INDIVIDUAL DETAILS			TOTAL
	PO type				PO location		Accompanied	Previous volunteer assignment	Gender M – F - N	
	Domestic NGO	Government agency	Intergovernmental agency	INGO	Urban	Rural				
Launchers	4	1	1	0	3	3	0	2	1 – 5 - 0	**6**
Enhancers	4	1	1	1	4	3	2	4	2 – 5 - 0	**7**
Career Breakers	0	3	0	0	1	2	0	1	0 – 3 - 0	**3**
Transitioners	6	5	1	0	9	3	2	7	4 – 7 - 1	**12**
Imposed Transitioners	1	5	0	1	3	4	1	2	2 – 5 - 0	**7**
Veterans	4	5	0	1	4	6	7	7	5 – 5 - 0	**10**
Total (volunteers)	**19**	**20**	**3**	**3**	**24**	**21**	**12**	**23**	**14 – 30 - 1**	**45**
Non-working partners	-	-	-	-	2	3	5	3	2 – 3 - 0	**5**
TOTAL (all)	**19**	**20**	**3**	**3**	**26**	**24**	**17**	**26**	**16 – 33 - 1**	**50**

‘INGO’ = International non-government organisation

‘Accompanied’ = Participant was accompanied by a partner during the assignment

‘Gender’ = Participants’ gender: ‘M’ = Male, “F” = Female, ‘N’ = Prefer not to say

Attachment 3 (panel 1)

Participant characteristics (T4)

Participant	Gender	Residence in Australia	Age at pre-departure	Highest qualification	Occupation category	Years in profession	Region of assignment
1	Female	Urban	50-59	Doctorate	Education/Training/Library	26	South Pacific
2	Female	Regional/Rural	30-39	Masters Degree	Health	8	Papua New Guinea
3	Male	Urban	50-59	Masters Degree	Engineering/Architecture	10	Central & North Pacific
4	Female	Urban	60-69	Masters Degree	Community/Social Development	35	Papua New Guinea
5	Female	Regional/Rural	70-79	Doctorate	Community/Social Development	30	South Pacific
6	Female	Urban	30-39	Bachelor Degree	Agriculture/Veterinary	3.5	East Asia
7	Female	Urban	30-39	Masters Degree	Community/Social Development	4.5	East Asia
8	Female	Urban	40-49	Masters Degree	Community/Social Development	7	Asia Archipelago
9	Female	Regional/Rural	20-29	Bachelor Degree	Business/Marketing/Tourism/Art & Design	5	Asia Archipelago
10	Female	Urban	60-69	Masters Degree	Education/Training/Library	30	South Pacific
11	Female	Urban	20-29	Bachelor Degree	Business/Marketing/Tourism/Art & Design	2.5	Asia Archipelago
12	Male	International	30-39	Bachelor Degree	Education/Training/Library	1	East Asia
14	Female	Urban	20-29	Bachelor Degree	Management/Admin/HR	2.5	Asia Archipelago
15	Female	Urban	70-79	Doctorate	Education/Training/Library	15	South Asia & Africa
16	Male	Urban	70-79	Doctorate	Education/Training/Library	5	South Asia & Africa
17	Male	Urban	50-59	Masters Degree	Information/Knowledge Management	40	Asia Archipelago
18	Female	Urban	50-59	Bachelor Degree	Management/Admin/HR	15	Asia Archipelago
19	Male	Urban	20-29	Bachelor Degree	Community/Social Development	0	Asia Archipelago
20	Female	Urban	20-29	Bachelor Degree	Business/Marketing/Tourism/Art & Design	1.5	Asia Archipelago
21	Female	International	30-39	Masters Degree	Management/Admin/HR	2.5	East Asia
22	Male	Urban	50-59	Masters Degree	Engineering/Architecture	36	East Asia
23	Female	Urban	30-39	Bachelor Degree	Health	8	Central & North Pacific
24	Female	Regional/Rural	40-49	Bachelor Degree	Business/Marketing/Tourism/Art & Design	25	Central & North Pacific
25	Female	Urban	60-69	Bachelor Degree	Education/Training/Library	41	South Asia & Africa
26	Female	Urban	40-49	Bachelor Degree	Business/Marketing/Tourism/Art & Design	26	Asia Archipelago
27	Female	Urban	20-29	Masters Degree	Health	1	Central & North Pacific
28	Female	Regional/Rural	20-29	Masters Degree	Health	3	South Pacific
29	Female	Urban	20-29	Bachelor Degree	Information/Knowledge Management	4	Asia Archipelago
30	Female	Urban	20-29	Bachelor Degree	Engineering/Architecture	7.5	South Asia & Africa

continued over

Participant characteristics (T4)

Participant	Gender	Residence in Australia	Age at pre-departure	Highest qualification	Occupation category	Years in profession	Region of assignment
31	Female	Urban	20-29	Bachelor Degree	Media/Communications/Public Relations/Fundraising	6	East Asia
32	Female	Urban	60-69	Bachelor Degree	Education/Training/Library	30	East Asia
33	Male	Urban	60-69	Masters Degree	Education/Training/Library	34	East Asia
35	Female	Urban	20-29	Masters Degree	Community/Social Development	2	South Pacific
36	Male	Urban	60-69	Doctorate	Business/Marketing/Tourism/Art & Design	30	East Asia
37	Female	Urban	20-29	Masters Degree	Business/Marketing/Tourism/Art & Design	1.5	East Asia
38	Male	Urban	60-69	Bachelor Degree	Education/Training/Library	20	South Asia & Africa
39	Male	Urban	30-39	Bachelor Degree	Law & Justice	4	East Asia
40	Female	Urban	50-59	Masters Degree	Health	13	East Asia
41	Prefer to self-describe	Urban	20-29	Bachelor Degree	Business/Marketing/Tourism/Art & Design	6	Asia Archipelago
42	Male	Regional/Rural	50-59	Diploma/Advanced Diploma	Skilled Trades	30	East Asia
43	Female	Urban	20-29	Masters Degree	Information/Knowledge Management	8	Asia Archipelago
44	Female	Urban	40-49	Doctorate	Natural Sciences/Environment	20	East Asia
45	Male	Urban	30-39	Masters Degree	Business/Marketing/Tourism/Art & Design	0.5	Asia Archipelago
46	Female	Regional/Rural	20-29	Bachelor Degree	Community/Social Development	2	Asia Archipelago
48	Male	Regional/Rural	70-79	Diploma/Advanced Diploma	Finance/Economics	10	East Asia
49	Female	Urban	50-59	Masters Degree	Education/Training/Library	37	Papua New Guinea
50	Male	Urban	60-69	Diploma/Advanced Diploma	Information/Knowledge Management	40	Papua New Guinea
52	Male	Urban	30-39	Masters Degree	Finance/Economics	13	Central & North Pacific
53	Female	Urban	30-39	Bachelor Degree	Law & Justice	8	East Asia
54	Male	Urban	20-29	Bachelor Degree	Agriculture/Veterinary	5	East Asia

Attachment 4

Research overview and sample interview schedule T4: 2023 (50 participants)

Purpose statements (phase III):

- To explicate the nature of personal and professional changes in participants across the study period (and in particularly since T3 in April 2021) that are relevant to the program
- To offer explanations for these changes, drawing on participants' experiences to date with the program (pre-, during and post-assignment) and their reflections on their experiences with the program

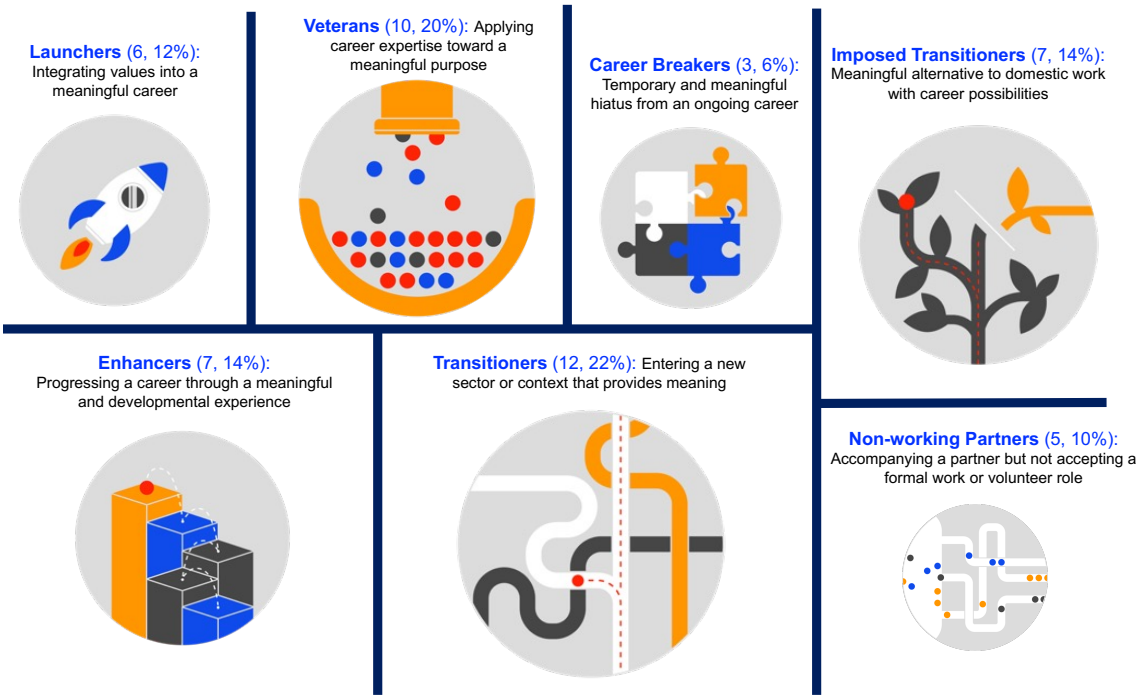
Research questions (phase III):

1. Overall, what have been the main impacts on participants (personally and professionally) of participants' involvement in the program?
2. To what extent and in what ways are any changes enacted by participants in their professional or personal lives?
3. What features of participants' involvement with the program have had the strongest impact on their reported personal and professional lives?
4. How can the program improve the way it supports the personal and professional development of its volunteers?

Interview schedule:

Section		Key topics
1.	Introduction	• Introductions, overview & permissions
2.	Current status	• Overview of current circumstances (personal & professional)
3.	Overall experiences since last interview	• Overview of key experiences in participants' personal and professional lives since T3 (2021): major events, challenges, opportunities • Participants' main reflections on their assignment and their involvement in the program
4.	Major outcomes and changes since last interview	• Key features of participants current lives relating to four main outcome areas - personal, professional, civic, international (specific examples and details) • Participants' perceptions of the main changes over preceding two years (examples of changes - what is (or do) different now from T3 and from T1, current skill/knowledge levels, perspective on – relating to four main outcome areas; attributed reasons for any changes; examples of changes being enacted) • Application of knowledge, capabilities and experiences by participants to their work/life (evidence of changes being enacted) • Participants' views about features of the assignment that have had the biggest impact on these aspects of their lives (and/or the changes)
5.	Overall reflections	• Participants' overall reflections on the main impacts of their involvement with the program to date (and basis for this)
6.	Future plans	• Participants' future plans (next five years)
7.	Conclusion	• Key features or omissions of discussion • What happens next

Summary of volunteer types



Volunteer type	Description
Launchers	Volunteers in this group are using their volunteer assignment as a stepping-stone to launch a career in a sector or profession that allows them to express their values, typically in the domain of international development (integrating values into a meaningful career).
Enhancers	Enhancers see their volunteer assignment as a means to consciously develop or enhance a career through the acquisition of skills, experiences, opportunities, and/or networks (progressing a career through a meaningful and developmental experience).
Career Breakers	For Career Breakers, a volunteer assignment is an interlude to a career that may be returned to after the assignment is completed, but which – at the time of accepting the assignment - is not fulfilling their needs (taking a temporary and meaningful hiatus from a career).
Transitioners	Transitioners view their volunteer assignment as a pathway to enter a new sector or context, most commonly with an international - rather than domestic – focus (entering a new sector or context that provides meaning). At T2 many Transitioners reported having affirmed or rejected a potential career avenue, suggesting the assignment may have been utilised to “test” a specific (and quite fixed) career trajectory, rather than “explore” possible career options.
Imposed Transitioners	Imposed Transitioners undertake a volunteer assignment in response to a negative career experience (e.g. redundancy) that leads them to consider a new profession or context (undertaking a meaningful alternative to domestic work with career possibilities).
Veterans	Volunteers in this group are undertaking a volunteer assignment as an opportunity to apply professional expertise accumulated through a long career in order to achieve a positive outcome (applying career expertise toward a meaningful purpose).
Non-working Partner	Non-working Partners accompany a partner on an international volunteer assignment as an approved accompanying dependant. While they attend VPLJ activities, they undertake no structured work or volunteer role (experiencing a vicarious assignment and adventure).

Attachment 6

Illustrative changing patterns of engagement with host countries from T3 to T4

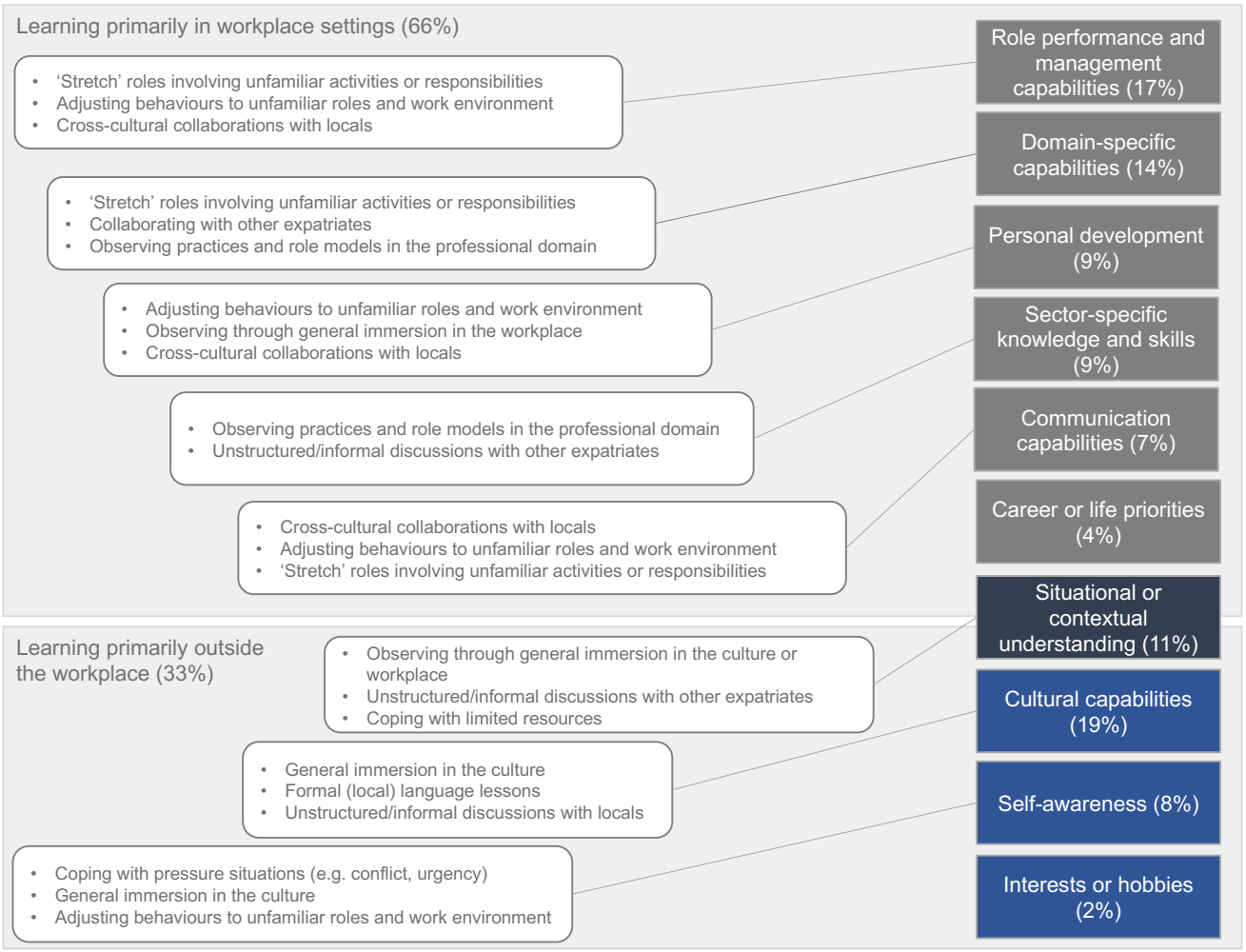
Participant	2021 (T3)	2023 (T4)
#03 (Enhancer) 	"For sure, yeah, yeah [I follow host country media & events]. I've still got – I wasn't a Facebook user before I went there but I had to get it because that's how they communicate. But I've still only, I've still only got, you know, the same – what do you call it, when you follow different groups? So, I've still got the same 4 or 5 groups I follow. So, I'm always getting Samoan feed on my Facebook. You're always seeing what's happening with the high commission or what the government is up to & so on. I guess you don't see much on Australian television obviously but I've still got a good feel for what's going on there. So, when I talk to [a HCN friend], I can talk politics & what's going on there or the latest flood or whatever happened. So, yeah, still very much engaged"	""I'm also on Facebook with the old [host-country] groups I had over there, so they're always sort of coming through and I can just – I just look at it and see how things are going. The politics is interesting because they went through a huge change […] so that's been interesting as well … they're nothing more than just voyeuristic groups, so they're just information coming through, I don't really get involved. I'll read it, but I don't seek it out … I'm not part of the High Commission group anymore, I felt there was a disconnect … but I look at Facebook feeds which is the local news that comes through, that sort of thing. And it is just general interest, see how things are going, that sort of thing. Look, it was a great time & it'll always hold a special place, but I'm in no rush to go back. I want to try other places as well"
#07 (Transitioner) 	"Definitely [follow the news in the host country], I think because my friends are still there. On our text chats they're keeping us updated of what's happened or – there was recently a big case outbreak in Cambodia – I definitely whenever anything pops up in the news around [the host country and region] I try to be across it … if there's something there then I'll read further than the headline which is a lot of my news reading"	"I still read about it a lot, mostly just reading the news whenever something pops up there & I also feel very spoilt that one of my friends was the former foreign correspondent, so we always talk a lot about [the host country] & he updates me on stuff that I might not be aware of that isn't making the mainstream news, so I get a lot of information through him. And another one of my friends is working on developing the […] in [the host country] at the moment, so I feel like I'm just surrounded by people that are working in or closely to, or an expertise in [the host country], so that kind of supplements just reading the news about it … there's peaks & troughs I'd say. There's times when I get really interested in it & will read really comprehensively & go on big deep dives to get into a particular issue & then I honestly forget about it or other stuff comes up, & then something will spark my interest again. I think being surrounded by people who also have a really strong connection to Cambodia, that also sparks it because I'll be like, "Oh have you read this thing", or "Did you see that this happened?", and then it starts again. So, I'd say it's been sustained but there's definitely been highs & lows over the years"
#44 (Career Breaker) 	"[The host country] has definitely got a piece of my heart, it's whenever it comes up on the news, I go, oh, it's [the host country] – and it's ridiculous, I really love telling people about my time there & the work, also the country & to go and visit, so yeah, I feel [the host country] is important to me … I guess I'm a bit more aware of a number of issues – maybe just because when it comes up in the news I go, oh, yeah, I remember that bit. I'm following the Australian Embassy in [the host country] on Facebook, so I see some of the issues that they're getting. And because I've now got [HCN] friends, I see the video clips they're showing of [host-country] news. So, yeah, I always had an interest in it, but now it kind of resonates with things that have happened like this"	"I'm still following [the Australian embassy] on Facebook. I don't always understand everything that happens. I'm still vaguely following some [host-country] news & every so often I have to ask my friend, that looks like a […] … I'm friends with a lot of [HCNs] on Facebook so that's how I am following what they did with their daily lives, I guess. That's most of my information nowadays"
#24 (Transitioner) 	"[I follow the host-country news] all the time … mainly from [speaking with former PO colleagues] … am I accessing different media? No but I am part of that Pacific Journalists Network which has some quite interesting stuff on it, that's on Facebook … everyone's talking about [a particular issue on social media] so I often give examples but that's part of a bigger [impact]"	"I suppose I feel a bit disconnected now, I mean I'd love to go over & visit, that's one thing I haven't done. I would like to do that. I follow local politicians in [the host country on social media], Australian politicians & I'm on quite a few expats' page, a Facebook page … I check just whatever comes through, I guess it's part of my feed … I follow a […] Journalist Network a little bit, not much comes up at the moment though; I'm more in the expat one. Cos those [local networks], I don't know, some of it's okay"
#29 (Transitioner) 	"I don't feel super connected, I don't feel like I can be super helpful to them but [we do exchange] some sort of messages & things. So I guess you're just checking in & so on, but I guess a lot of passive information like on the WhatsApp channel with the organisation & Facebook friends & Instagram friends & just through other people in where I was, who I followed. So I feel like I am quite well across what's happening there because there is a lot of social media & that sort of [thing]. It's not like intentionally something we are directly doing it, but there is also a little bit of that. I guess in the last 12 months it's a much more occasional – ad-hoc work messaging different people at different points but very - feels very light touch … on the weekend I watched [local] language news & what was happening"	"[I don't follow events in the host country] as much as I should, it's probably more just broadly world news most of the time. There was a [host-country language] conversation group [run nearby] … but I haven't had the time to go. Every now & then I try & listen to [host-country] things or if there's something that comes up, I'd probably jump on it quicker than other countries … it doesn't help that [the host-country] media is very chaotic. It's hard, it's got challenges to navigate that. I'm in a WhatsApp group which is their version of it, and there's some people in social media. I guess it's partially through that they share things that are happening & talk about things occasionally"
#07 (Transitioner) 	"Definitely [follow the news in the host country], I think because my friends are still there. On our text chats they're keeping us updated of what's happened or – there was recently a big case outbreak in Cambodia – I definitely whenever anything pops up in the news around [the host country and region] I try to be across it … if there's something there then I'll read further than the headline which is a lot of my news reading"	"I still read about it a lot, mostly just reading the news whenever something pops up there & I also feel very spoilt that one of my friends was the former foreign correspondent, so we always talk a lot about [the host country] & he updates me on stuff that I might not be aware of that isn't making the mainstream news, so I get a lot of information through him. And another one of my friends is working on developing the […] in [the host country] at the moment, so I feel like I'm just surrounded by people that are working in or closely to, or an expertise in [the host country], so that kind of supplements just reading the news about it … there's peaks & troughs I'd say. There's times when I get really interested in it & will read really comprehensively & go on big deep dives to get into a particular issue & then I honestly forget about it or other stuff comes up, & then something will spark my interest again. I think being surrounded by people who also have a really strong connection to Cambodia, that also sparks it because I'll be like, "Oh have you read this thing", or "Did you see that this happened?", and then it starts again. So, I'd say it's been sustained but there's definitely been highs & lows over the years"

Illustrative changing patterns of contact with expatriate communities (T2-T4)

Participant	T2 (2020)	T3 (2021)	T4 (2023)
#32 (Non-working partner) 	A: There were some girls, we used to go out for drinks every Thursday. We'd meet for drinks & then usually have dinner. Friday night the volunteers usually went to the beer hall - which is like beer drinking. Because there were up to 30 volunteers there, and we just had a WhatsApp, there were always things on … someone would say, 'Ah, I might go to this movie, or 'We thought we might go away this weekend, anyone want to go?' We were never short of options to do things, if we wanted to do things.	Q: Are you still in touch with them? A: We're sometimes in touch, Less & less, but I'm still on the list that I get the news & things, so every now & then, I do. We do email each other. But I have a feeling over time it might get less & less, unless we tag with each other, you're actually in the same location at some stage … socially it's lovely to catch up with them & to be a part, to hear what they're doing & things. And where life journey's taken them.	A: I have been in touch with them since [being repatriated] but not recently. On our [recent holiday overseas] we initially were thinking we might come home via [the host country]. And if I'd done that, I would've made sure it was a Thursday night so I could go out with the girls. I still get [social media] communications from them of all the things that's happening. Q: Do you exchange greetings with them still? A: No. Well, one of them, her husband works for IT over there, & they're back there again. So, when she's in Australia I contacted her. But otherwise, no.
#35 (Transitioner) 	A: The Australian volunteers & the New Zealand volunteers got together & had a pretty good relationship so there was sports that we would all play together, or play board games, or every Friday there would be a drink that you could all go to. These activities were open to everyone, they were sent out on a mailing list to any expat who wanted to join. But it was always mainly volunteers … towards the end we realised that the Japanese volunteers weren't being involved as much as they could have & it turned out that they were actually too scared to get involved because they couldn't speak English, but they could speak [the host country language], but that wasn't a problem because we could speak [host-country language] & they didn't realise that actually we can communicate with them fine, you don't have to speak English, and so it's just a shame that COVID happened when it did because we had only just started to get volunteers from non-English speaking countries to realize that.	Q: The New Zealanders, Australians & Japanese volunteers you told us about [in the previous interview]. Are you still in touch with them? A: Yep, not so much – I'm not in touch with the Japanese volunteers anymore, but the Aussies & the Kiwis, yep. Q: Are you using [the host country language]? A: Yep, we use […]. Q: Is it a Zoom chat you have? A: Yep, yeah. So, about once a month we all jump onto Zoom & play – you know, there's different ways to play online games now, so we play those & we talk in [the host country language].	Q: You previously were in touch with some New Zealanders, Japanese & Australian expats & volunteers. Has that continued? A: Not as many. But I'm still in contact with a few. Again, there's a few I haven't spoken to in a while but I wouldn't have a problem reaching out to them. I think one of the issues is we all live in different places so it's not like, 'Hey, you want to catch up for a coffee?' But if I was in their state or city, then I'd reach out to them to catch up. Not in contact with everyone, but still in contact with quite a few. Q: You used to have Zoom chats with the group & play games. Has that continued? A: No, that stopped once COVID restrictions eased up, unfortunately. I think as well because in terms of the number of expats that were there, it wasn't very high. So everyone knew everyone's business & all the volunteers hung out & all did social stuff together. So you were quite involved in each other's lives. Whereas when you separate out & go to different states & stuff like that, you're not doing stuff all the time together. And so eventually you lose track of what everyone's doing.

Attachment 8

Reported learning outcomes by category, context and cause at T2



Notes:

The 55 participants identified a total of 522 discrete learning outcomes at T2. The figure above identifies the main categories of learning outcomes reported by the sample, the contexts in which these most commonly occurred (i.e. work/non-work), and the main learning approaches used by participants. The dark boxes on the right show the 10 categories of learning outcomes and the percentage of total learning outcomes that each comprised, arranged vertically from those that occurred most often in workplace settings (large rectangular box at the top) to those occurring most often outside the workplace (large rectangular box at the bottom). Learning outcomes relating to 'Situational or contextual understanding' fell evenly in work/non-work settings.

The figure also identifies the main learning approaches used by participants for the eight main categories of learning outcomes (white boxes on the left): five that occurred primarily at work (top), two that occurred primarily outside work (bottom), and 'situational and contextual understanding.'

More details and operational definitions of the categories of these learning outcomes can be found in Sections 4.2.2 and 4.2.3 of *Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers: Phase Two Final Report* (December 2020).

Attachment 9

Two models showing the relationships between international volunteering and formal study (T3)

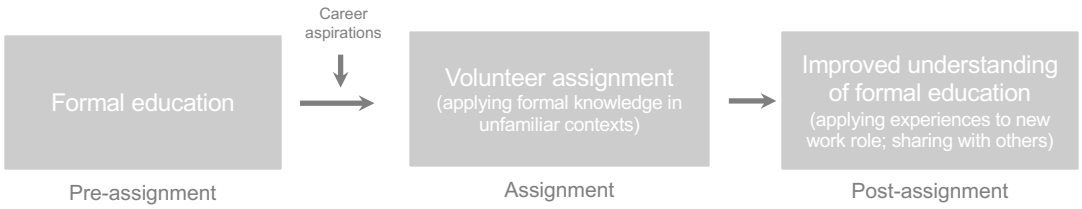
Model 1: Consolidating and extending past formal education

Developing a better or different understanding of prior formal education through experiencing it "in practice" during their assignment via either:

1. Fulfilling a pre-assignment objective to accumulate practical experience to complement recent formal education (e.g., wanting to gain professional experience that might otherwise not be available, and/or wanting to accumulate complementary work experience to build a résumé).
2. Experiencing a new context (e.g. culture, sector) that provides a basis to develop a better understanding of when, why or how their formal education is transferable to a different context.

The figure below shows that, for some participants, this was closely linked to pre-assignment career aspirations, which influenced their decision to volunteer and/or the assignment choice. The unfamiliar context provided during the assignment (e.g. international setting and/or international development ecosystem) were important contributors. As well as improved understanding, some participants were able to then apply and/or share this new knowledge in workplaces after their assignment.

How volunteer assignments consolidate and extend past formal education



Model 2: Inspiring or supporting future formal education

Volunteering providing an inspiration or guidance for future formal education to further a professional opportunity or to consolidate or build on an insight that arose during the assignment.

As the figure below shows, the formal education is typically undertaken to facilitate a career direction that was sparked by an experience during the assignment. (e.g., exposure to experts in the field, being introduced to a new passion/interest), and the volunteer experiences are often perceived as valuable in helping to understand and perform well in the studies.

How volunteer assignments inspire, guide or support future formal education

Attachment 10

Overview of main personal changes and conditions conducive to these identified at T3

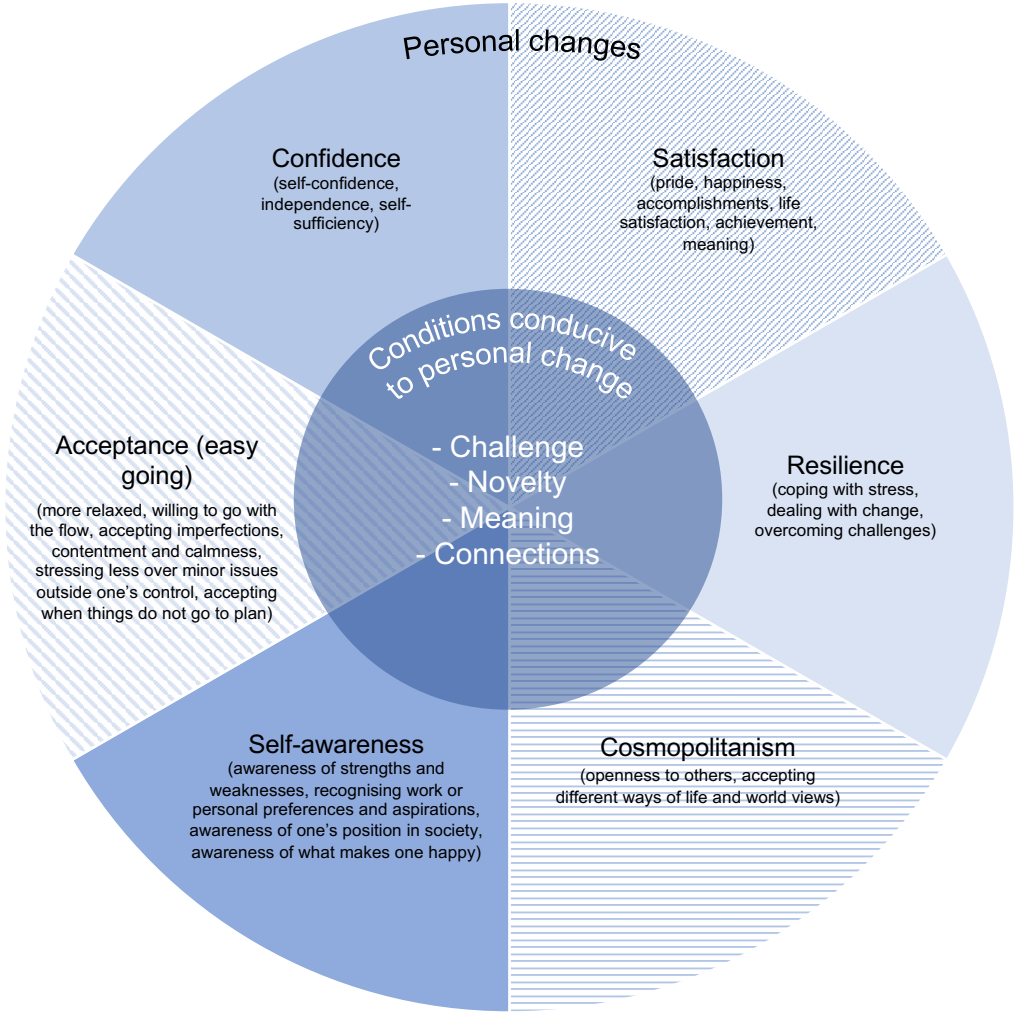
Conditions conducive to personal change:

Challenge: Confronting difficulties associated with the partner organisation, resource availability, work role, interpersonal interactions or living conditions

Novelty: Coping and performing work (or non-work) activities effectively in an unfamiliar culture, environment, language, work role and/or context

Meaning: Having work objectives, relationships and impacts that are significant and of value personally and to others

Connections: Collaborating, mentoring, socialising and sharing work/social settings with colleagues, clients, counterparts and communities



Interpreting participants' personal changes

1. While some outcomes might be universally perceived as favourable, others are open to interpretation. For instance, some participants reporting "acceptance" now plan less and prioritise quality of life over other activities. Some whose outcomes reflected a form of "cosmopolitanism" reported being less tolerant of, or having less in common with, some groups from their own culture.
2. Although all these changes are classified as "personal" they frequently arose from work situations during volunteers' assignments, and several have had practical utility in participants' current work situations. Thus, while the participants viewed these changes as primarily personal, overlap exists between these six outcomes and those more directly relating to participants' careers (Section 5.3) or international/cultural capabilities (Section 4.4).
3. All six changes arose mostly through informal and unplanned work or non-work situations during the volunteer assignment. Nonetheless, the contribution of structured learning, including VPLJ activities, was noted in earlier reports and raised by some participants. It is clear that PDBs and ICOPs provided valuable platforms to facilitate some of the changes that participants reported.
4. The changes are inter-related. Satisfaction abets confidence abets resilience; self-awareness may promote cosmopolitanism and satisfaction.
5. Some assignment features that contributed to participants' personal changes (notably challenge and novelty) also contributed to some negative feelings (stress, isolation, anxiety). These likely hindered, rather than facilitated, some volunteers performing their roles effectively. For some assignments, therefore, the right degree of challenge or novelty for the volunteer is likely an important determinant of both personal change and performance.