

# Volunteering across Australia



Volunteering makes a valuable economic and social contribution to society. Volunteers provide services which would otherwise have to be paid for or left undone, allowing non-profit organisations to allocate their often limited financial resources elsewhere. The value of work contributed by volunteers to non-profit institutions in 1999–2000 was estimated at \$8.9 billion.<sup>1</sup> Voluntary work also helps build networks, shared values and social cohesion while providing volunteers with opportunities for social engagement<sup>2</sup> and to exercise social responsibility by helping others or the community.

This article focuses on the 20% of the adult population who reported in the 2006 Census that they had volunteered. It examines the relationship between mobility and participation in voluntary work, differences in volunteering rates between Urban Centres and Rural Localities across Australia, and the characteristics of communities with high rates of volunteering.

## Voluntary work

Volunteers are those people aged 15 years and over who reported in the 2006 Census that they had volunteered at least once in the previous 12 months. The volunteering rate for a given area is the proportion of that area's population aged 15 years and over who had volunteered in the previous 12 months.

## Urban Centres and Rural Localities

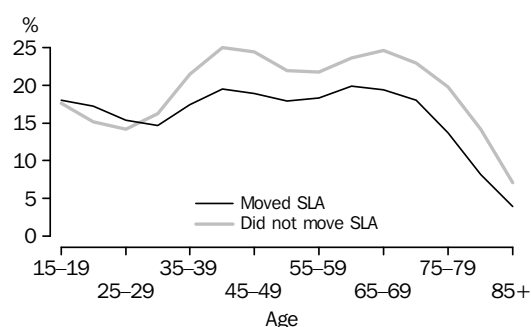
A **Rural Locality** is generally defined as a population cluster of between 200 and 999 people, while an Urban Centre has 1,000 or more people. For the purposes of this article, Urban Centres have been further split into **Small Urban Centres** of between 1,000 and 9,999 people and **Large Urban Centres** of 10,000 or more people.

## Mobility and voluntary work

People who moved community (Statistical Local Area, see Glossary) in the 12 months prior to the 2006 Census were less likely to have volunteered than longer-term residents. In 2006, 17% of recent movers participated in voluntary work compared with 21% of non-movers. However, this pattern varied with age, with differences most pronounced at the peak volunteering age groups of 40–49 years and 65–69 years, and among those aged 70–84 years. There was little difference in volunteering rates for those aged under 30. See the 'Community overview' for information about volunteering across the life cycle, p. 90–101.

The lower rate among movers appears to be temporary: those people who had moved between 1 and 5 years before the 2006 Census had only a slightly lower rate of voluntary work (19%) than non-movers (21%). This suggests that after an initial period of settling into a community, new arrivals gradually become integrated into the community through activities such as voluntary work. It also suggests that communities experiencing recent population change (for example, growth) are only likely to experience a temporary reduction in people participating in voluntary work. However, communities with high population turnover may also have a high turnover in volunteers, which could affect the continuity of programs and activities they are involved in.

## Age profile of volunteers by whether moved SLA in last 12 months



### Urban Centres and Rural Localities

Results of the 2006 Census show a relationship between population size and participation in voluntary work (see graph below). As population size increases, participation in voluntary work declines. In 2006, 27% of adults living in Rural Localities had volunteered, compared with 25% of those in Small Urban Centres and 18% of those in Large Urban Centres.

These differences can be partly explained by the different age and life cycle structures of these populations. The two peak age groups for participation in voluntary work were 40–49 and 65–69 years, and Rural Localities generally had older populations than Small Urban Centres and Large Urban Centres with median ages of 40, 39 and 36 years respectively. Rates of participation in voluntary work are also generally higher among parents of school-aged children (see the 'Community overview', p. 90–101) and Rural Localities had a slightly higher proportion of children aged under 15 years (22%) than Small Urban Centres (21%) and Large Urban Centres (19%). In addition, smaller communities in rural and regional areas may have more interconnected social networks which facilitate cooperation among residents<sup>3</sup>, or they may have a greater need for volunteers to meet demands for services and entertainment that are provided by the government or businesses in the larger Urban Centres.

For some people, lack of proficiency in spoken English may be a barrier to participation in voluntary work. Overall in 2006, people who spoke English well or very well were more than twice as likely to have volunteered as those who did not speak English or did not speak it

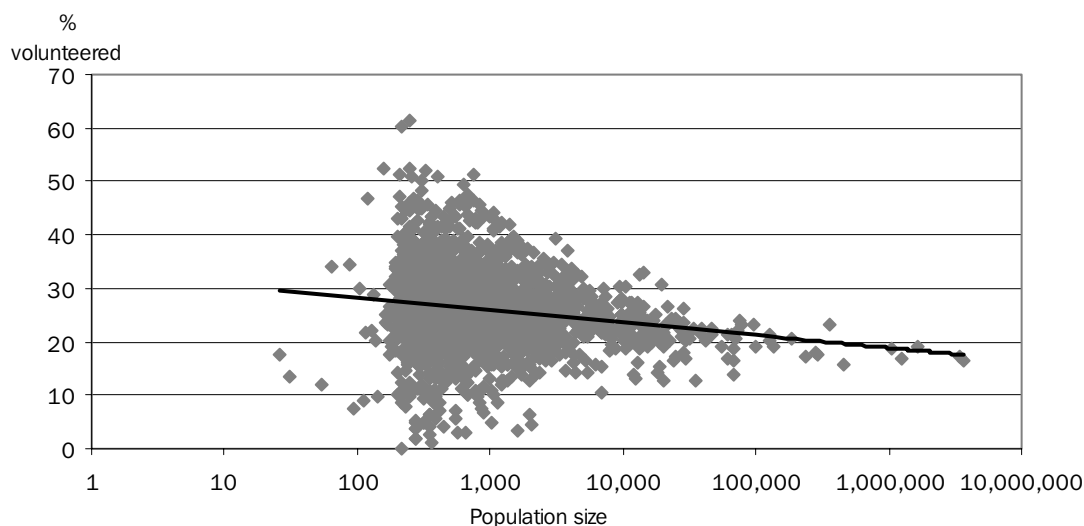
well (13% compared with 5%). Differences in English proficiency between urban and rural areas may partly explain different volunteering rates. In Large Urban Centres, 3.6% of the population spoke English not well or not at all compared to 0.7% in Small Urban Centres and 1.4% in Rural Localities. Differences may also reflect varying attitudes as to what constitutes volunteering across cultural groups.

### Volunteering in Small Urban Centres

Among Small Urban Centres, rates of voluntary work ranged from 3% to 44% in 2006. A comparison of communities with high rates of participation in voluntary work shows considerable variation in the characteristics of their populations. For example, Barcaldine in Queensland's Central West and Jamestown to the north of Adelaide in South Australia both had high rates of voluntary work (see table next page) despite very different population profiles. Barcaldine had a median age of 36 years and a high proportion of children, with 23% of the population aged 0–14 years.

This is consistent with findings on the relationship between voluntary work and life cycle stage, with parents of primary school-aged children more likely to volunteer than others. Jamestown had a much older population with a median age of 46 years and only 17% of the population aged 0–14 years. This community typifies the second peak in volunteering that occurs for people aged in their 60s as they retire from paid work. It should also be noted that voluntary work encompasses a wide range of activities and volunteers at different life cycle stages may be involved in very different types of voluntary work.

### Population size by proportion of population who volunteered



## Small Urban Centres with the highest volunteering rates in each state/territory(a)

		Total		Population		Median age	Religious affiliation	Median household income(b)
		population	Volunteers	aged 0–14				
		no.	%	%	years	%	\$	
Balranald	NSW	1 200	38.6	19.5	40	81.8	479	
Tathra	NSW	1 600	36.7	18.5	45	70.3	556	
Ouyen	Vic.	1 100	44.3	17.7	45	74.2	458	
Charlton	Vic.	1 100	42.9	18.0	48	78.2	420	
Barcaldine	Qld	1 300	36.8	22.6	36	78.1	525	
Maleny	Qld	1 300	36.0	20.1	42	57.8	435	
Jamestown	SA	1 400	41.9	16.9	46	72.4	508	
Crystal Brook	SA	1 200	41.6	18.3	45	70.2	460	
Exmouth	WA	1 800	34.3	19.7	37	53.4	667	
Kalbarri	WA	1 300	33.8	20.8	41	60.3	501	
Evandale	Tas.	1 100	30.8	24.8	39	71.0	533	
Deloraine	Tas.	2 200	28.4	20.0	42	68.4	425	
Nhulunbuy	NT	4 100	31.6	26.4	33	58.0	1 134	
Jabiru	NT	1 100	24.6	24.7	32	41.6	1 018	
<b>All Small Urban Centres</b>	<b>Aust.</b>	<b>..</b>	<b>25.0</b>	<b>21.3</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>69.9</b>	<b>507</b>	

(a) ACT has no Urban Centres with a population between 1,000 and 9,999.

(b) Median equivalised gross weekly household income.

While volunteering tends to be associated with socio-demographic characteristics such as life cycle stage, religious affiliation and employment status (outlined above and in the Community overview, p. 90–101), local factors also play a role in determining participation rates. For example, rates of religious affiliation varied in Barcaldine (78%) and Jamestown (72%) despite high rates of voluntary work in both communities.

Generally, participation in voluntary work is higher among those who work part-time than among those who work full-time or are not in the labour force (see 'Community overview', p. 90–101). However, communities with high levels of volunteering had a wide range of labour force participation patterns. For example, in the tourist resort town of Exmouth on the remote North West Cape of Western Australia, where one third of the population volunteered, 75% of adults were in the labour force and 20% of adults worked part-time. In contrast, Crystal Brook, the service centre at the southern end of the Flinders Ranges in South Australia, had a lower labour force participation rate (48%) and 14% of adults

employed part-time, below the 17% overall rate for Small Urban Centres. In Crystal Brook 42% of the population volunteered.

### Volunteering in Large Urban Centres

Like Small Urban Centres, voluntary work rates in Large Urban Centres ranged widely from 13% to 34% in 2006. Large Urban Centres with high rates of participation in voluntary work had a range of population profiles. Warragul, a commercial centre in the agricultural and dairy farming region of West Gippsland, had one of the highest rates of voluntary work in Victoria (27%). This Large Urban Centre had a median age of 37 years and a high proportion of children, with 22% of its population aged 0–14. Victor Harbor in South Australia had a similarly high voluntary work rate (30%) despite having a much older population. This coastal resort town on the Fleurieu Peninsula had a median age of 56 years, and only 13% of the population aged 0–14 years. Again, these figures reflect the peaks in volunteering that occur among parents of primary school-aged children and people aged in their 60s who have retired from paid work.

Large Urban Centres with the highest volunteering rates in each state/territory(a)

		Total population no.	Volunteers %	Population aged 0–14 %	Median age years	Religious affiliation %	Household income(b) \$
Armidale	NSW	19 500	30.6	19.5	32	73.2	523
Bowral	NSW	11 500	27.0	19.5	46	76.2	674
Horsham	Vic.	14 100	33.0	20.0	39	74.6	523
Warragul	Vic.	11 500	27.5	22.0	37	66.1	559
Nambour	Qld	13 500	25.2	20.8	39	66.3	487
Warwick	Qld	12 600	25.1	22.8	36	78.7	469
Crafers- Bridgewater	SA	13 400	32.6	19.4	40	55.7	802
Victor Harbor	SA	10 400	30.2	12.7	56	63.7	420
Albany	WA	25 200	24.4	20.4	39	59.8	530
Busselton	WA	15 400	23.8	21.0	39	61.8	548
Kingston- Blackmans Bay	Tas.	17 300	25.2	20.8	37	69.1	657
Hobart	Tas.	128 600	21.4	17.2	39	66.4	593
Alice Springs	NT	21 600	26.5	23.5	32	59.3	792
Darwin	NT	66 300	21.4	20.1	33	60.8	823
Canberra- Queanbeyan	ACT/ NSW	356 100	23.4	19.4	34	67.3	901
<b>All Large Urban Centres</b>	<b>Aust.</b>	<b>. .</b>	<b>18.1</b>	<b>19.4</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>70.5</b>	<b>666</b>

(a) ACT has only one Urban Centre with a population of 10,000 or more.

(b) Median equivalised gross weekly household income.

The 2006 General Social Survey found a relationship between socioeconomic status and voluntary work with higher rates of volunteering recorded for those areas with greater socioeconomic advantage.<sup>4</sup> The census collects income data from individuals, from which median *household income*<sup>5</sup> can be derived. Results from the 2006 Census show a range of median *household incomes* across Large Urban Centres with high rates of voluntary work. For example, in South Australia, Crafers-Bridgewater in the Adelaide Hills had a median *household income* of \$802 per week compared with \$420 for Victor Harbor. Both communities had voluntary work rates around 30%. However, it should be noted that Victor Harbor had a higher home ownership rate, suggesting that it may have higher socioeconomic status than implied by *household income* alone. In Victor Harbor, 42% of the population lived in fully owned homes (that is, without a mortgage) compared with 34% in Crafers-Bridgewater.

## Endnotes

1 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2002, *Australian National Accounts: Non-Profit Institutions Satellite Account, 1999–2000*, cat. no. 5256.0, ABS, Canberra.

2 ABS 2006, *Aspects of Social Capital, Australia, 2006*, cat. no. 4911.0, ABS, Canberra.

3 Allcott, H., Karlan, D., Mobius, M., Rosenblat, T. and Szeidl, A. 2007, 'Community size and network closure' in *American Economic Review*, Vol. 97, No. 2, p. 80–85.

4 ABS 2007, *Voluntary Work, Australia, 2006*, cat. no. 4441.0, ABS, Canberra.

5 Median equivalised gross household income, referred to here as median household income (see Glossary).