

Media Release

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Intergenerational volunteering a benefit to both younger and older Australians

Shanya Irushi Abeyasinghe says volunteering in aged care has “filled a gap” in her life.

The 17-year-old VCE student began volunteering with for-purpose organisation VMCH in 2019, dedicating her time to the residents of John R Hannah aged care.

“I wanted to go out into the wider community and get to know other people. It’s about making new connections.”

August 7-13 is [National Student Volunteer Week](#), celebrating student volunteers and promoting volunteering to young people across Australia.

This year’s theme ‘Give. Grow. Belong.’ highlights a generation of young people who are more socially conscious than ever before and are committed creating positive change.

Despite this, volunteering in Australia been on the decline, particularly among young people.

In a [report](#) released last year by [Volunteering Australia](#), it was found that between 2016 and 2021, the number of people aged 15-19 years who volunteer declined by 29%.

It is believed this decline is largely due to the impacts of COVID-19, with youth volunteering yet to show signs of recovery.

Intergenerational volunteering has been in focus over the last few years, partly thanks to ABC’s television series [‘Old People’s Home for 4 Year Olds’](#).

Following the show’s success, a spinoff called [‘Old People’s Home for Teenagers’](#) was released, highlighting what older adults and teenagers have in common; loneliness.

The show uncovered that bringing these two cohorts together helped to combat loneliness and saw an overall improvement in participants mood and wellbeing.

Whilst Shanya’s volunteer journey began as part of the Duke of Edinburgh’s Award, the mental and emotional benefits were quick to surface.

“When I was little, most of my grandparents had already passed away. There was just a gap in my life. Being here has helped fill that gap.”

During her visits, Shanya has found one-on-one conversations with residents to be mutually beneficial.

“Often we’ll talk about their past experiences, things like that. They lived through a different era, but I find myself relating to them in a lot of ways and learning from their experiences.

“After our conversations I’ll see them smiling...watching them light up like that makes me feel like I’m helping to make a difference.”

Shanya is hopeful more young people will take the leap into volunteering.

“I would definitely encourage people my age to take these opportunities and volunteer in aged care, or wherever you want to volunteer. Get involved in the community because those connections really matter.

“For so long I've looked at life just like school was; getting from one stage to the next stage, to university, to where I want to be in ten years or whatever. Through this experience, I've learnt to slow down and make connections along the way and not be so focused on my life.”

If you'd like more information on VMCH's volunteering opportunities, [click here](#).

Media enquiries

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About VMCH

Here at VMCH, our services are as diverse as the people we support.

Our values underpin the work we do. As a Catholic for-purpose organisation, compassion, respect and inclusion aren't just words to us, they guide us in everything we do.

While we've been around for over a century, we're always moving forward. Always staying true to who we are by supporting people and families to live their best lives; providing a place to call home and spaces to learn and grow.

Our professional and compassionate teams are with you on your life journey; helping you with a wide range of support from early learning and therapy, specialist education, disability services, affordable homes, residential aged care, retirement living and at-home aged care.

