

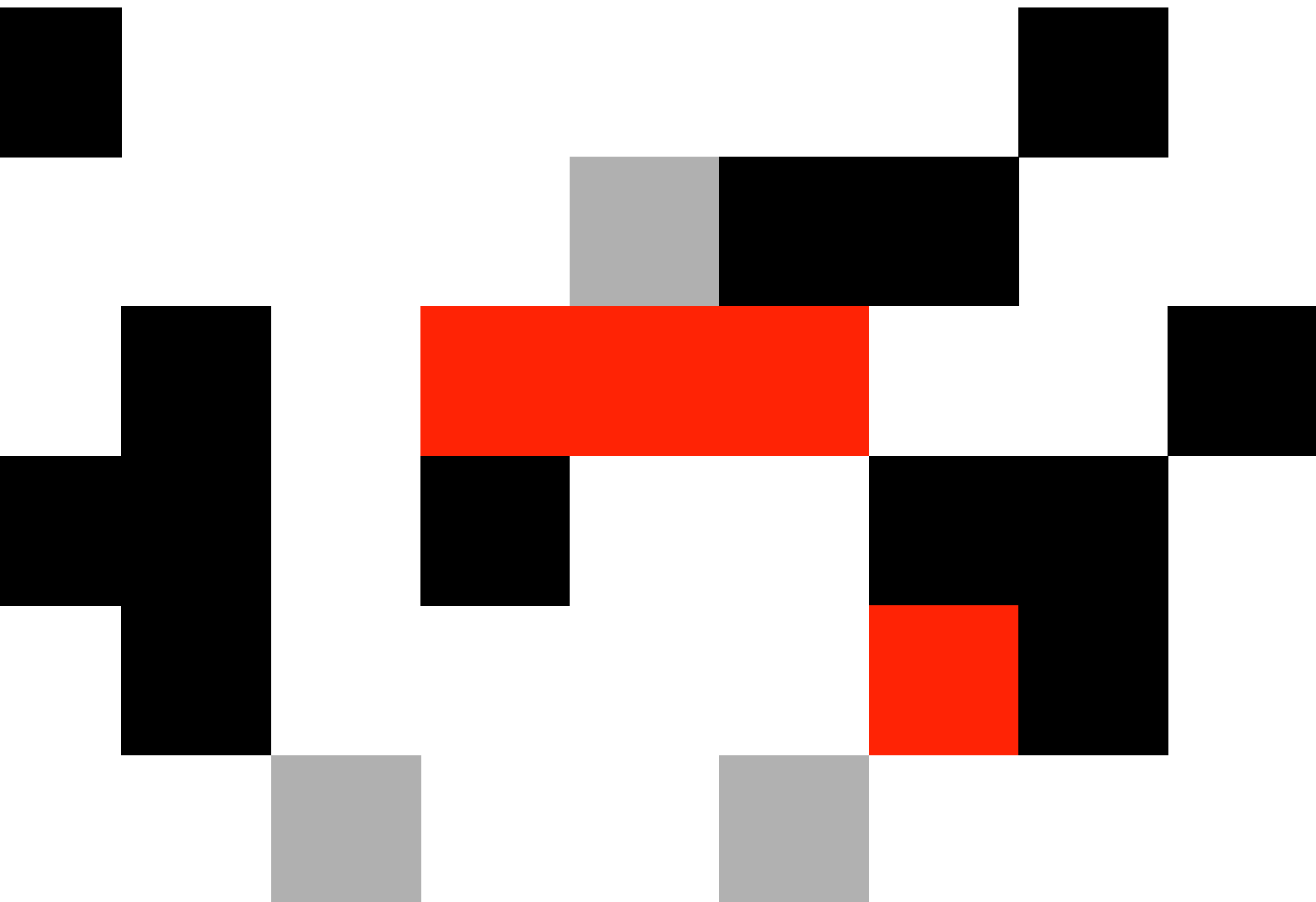


UTS Business School

# Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers (2019-21)

## Summary Final Report

April 2022



## Acknowledgements

The authors wish to express their appreciation to all 55 participants of the *Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers* for being so generous with their time and ideas, and for their willingness to be open, expansive, and thoughtful in sharing parts of their volunteer journey.

Thank you also to members of the project steering committee who provided insight and feedback throughout the project, and especially to Farooq Dar (Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Advisor) and Jake Phelan (Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Manager), for their support and advice through the three years of this project.

## About UTS

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## Citation

Fee, A., Devereux, P., Everingham, P., Allum, C. & Perold, H. (2022). *Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers (2019-21): Final Report (Summary)*, Prepared for the Australian Volunteers Program.



# 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
AQF	Australian Qualifications Framework – a government policy framework that defines recognised education and training qualifications in Australia
AVI	Australian Volunteers International
AVP	Australian Volunteer Program, referred to in this document as “the program” unless quoted by respondents
<i>Career Breakers</i>	One of seven categories of participants delineated in this project based on the participants’ motivations for volunteering and how these intersected with their career. <i>Career Breakers</i> 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)
BLM	Black Lives Matter social and political movement that emanated from the United States of America and that became globally prominent throughout 2019 and 2020
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
<i>Enhancers</i>	One of seven categories of participants delineated in this project based on the participants’ motivations for volunteering and how these intersected with their career. <i>Enhancers</i> 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
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
<i>Imposed Transitioners</i>	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 <i>Imposed Transitioners</i> , 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
<i>Launchers</i>	One of seven categories of participants delineated in this project based on the participants’ motivations for volunteering and how these intersected with their career. <i>Launchers</i> 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
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
<i>Non-working Partner</i>	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	Respondents who participated in the Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers (2019-21)
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 participants 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
RAVN	Returned Australian Volunteer Network
Remote volunteering	An international volunteer role that involves the volunteer providing support for a PO online rather than being based in the host country
SDG	The United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goals
<i>Transitioners</i>	One of seven categories of participants delineated in this project based on the participants’ motivations for volunteering and how these intersected with their career. <i>Transitioners</i> 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)
<i>Veterans</i>	One of seven categories of participants delineated in this project based on the participants’ motivations for volunteering and how these intersected with their career. <i>Veterans</i> 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 intended to support volunteers’ learning and success during the assignment, including pre-departure briefing, in-country orientation programs, and other organised events. It included the PDB (before departing Australia) and ICOP (upon arrival in the host country)
LSAV	Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers (2019-21)



# Executive Summary

The *Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers* (LSAV) is a research project that 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 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).

This report outlines findings of the study's first three years (2019-21), which tracked a cohort of 54 Australian volunteers and "approved accompanying dependents" (AADs) who in 2019 commenced assignments in 16 countries. Scheduled assignment durations ranged from 2-18 months although most were curtailed prematurely by COVID. Data were collected via a series of semi-structured interviews with each participant at three waves: prior to commencing their assignment (T1), at the end of their assignment (T2), and again 12 months after completing their assignment (T3). This report complements earlier reports outlining participants' pre-assignment motives and expectations (Phase One, 2019) and in-country experiences (Phase Two, 2020).

The study reveals generally favourable personal and professional impacts for participants despite their truncated assignments and the substantial post-assignment social and economic impacts created by COVID. Most participants are more engaged with, informed about, and connected to their host countries and the international development landscape in which the program operates. Most of those who entered the program with the aim to enhance or change their professional career have been able to take steps toward achieving this. Beneficial personal changes include improved satisfaction and meaning in life, confidence, and self-awareness. While the long-term consequences of these changes may unfold more fully in coming years, participants have begun to reap benefits through applying these in tangible ways to their civic and professional activities, lifestyle, and social lives.

At the same time, positive outcomes have been unevenly dispersed. At T3, small numbers of participants were struggling with challenging repatriations, personal upheaval, and career setbacks – mostly associated with the forced repatriation. In general, the program has been least developmental for volunteers seeking to use the assignment as a pathway to transition to a new career or sector, and for developing capabilities and networks that relate specifically to participants' professional area.

Features of the program that appear to have provided a platform for many of the positive changes reported by participants include the challenge, novelty and meaning of volunteers' assignments (and living conditions), opportunities to interact and collaborate with host-country nationals and other volunteers, and certain volunteer professional learning journey (VPLJ) activities. In many ways, the most vibrant manifestation of volunteers' assignments continues through volunteers' ongoing social networks - especially with fellow volunteers, which are ballasted by shared values and experiences. These networks act as both an outcome and propellant of many of the most meaningful changes and appear to be important mechanisms that direct and sustain many of the beneficial changes that volunteers undergo.

Section 3 outlines four overarching recommendations for the program. In general, the recommendations centre on four sets of activities that, in unison, are likely to help volunteers to benefit personally and professionally during and after their volunteer assignments. These include making available in ways that do not detract from the program's primary objectives:

- Opportunities for volunteers to form, sustain and contribute to social networks that offer support, friendship and information, and allow them to develop and apply newfound capabilities. These include networks comprising other volunteers, host-country nationals, others from their professional field, and various groups who are touchstones on volunteers' journey through the program.
- Volunteer assignments with "learning-intensive characteristics" in terms of the role, PO environment, placement setting and experiences. Importantly and where feasible, doing this should consider individual volunteers' objectives, needs, circumstances or past experiences that may influence their potential to gain personally or professionally during and/or after their volunteer assignments.
- Structured support and opportunities, primarily under the auspices of the VPLJ, to help volunteers understand and take advantage of the many informal and incidental learning opportunities that the assignment presents. This might include, for instance, activities designed to assist volunteers to integrate formal (via VPLJ) and informal (unstructured) learning, transfer learning to new situations (including post-assignment), and articulate their personal and professional development in meaningful ways (including to prospective employers).
- Information for program staff to assist them to support volunteers to benefit personally and professionally. This includes efforts to understand the distinctive features of different assignment modalities, the roles of social media in connecting volunteers to POs and other networks, and ways to customise support to certain types of volunteers to enhance their propensity to benefit personally and professionally from the program.



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# 1. Study Overview

## 1.1 Introduction and Background

This report summarises results and recommendations from the research project, *Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers* (LSAV) for the period 2019-21. The project was undertaken by a global research team led by UTS Business School, University of Technology Sydney, for the Australian Volunteers Program (“the program”).

The LSAV’s primary objectives are to:

1. Explicate the nature of personal and professional changes in participants across the study period that are relevant to the program;
2. Offer explanations for these changes, drawing on participants’ experiences with and reflections on the program before, during and after their assignments; and
3. Present a critical review of participants’ contact with the program throughout their volunteer cycle (before, during and after their assignment).

Analysis focused on the program’s impact on four outcome areas: (i) civic participation, engagement and literacy (Section 2.1), (ii) global literacy and connections (Section 2.2), (iii) career progression and professional capabilities (Section 2.3), and (iv) personal circumstances and capabilities (Section 2.4).

The LSAV’s results 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.

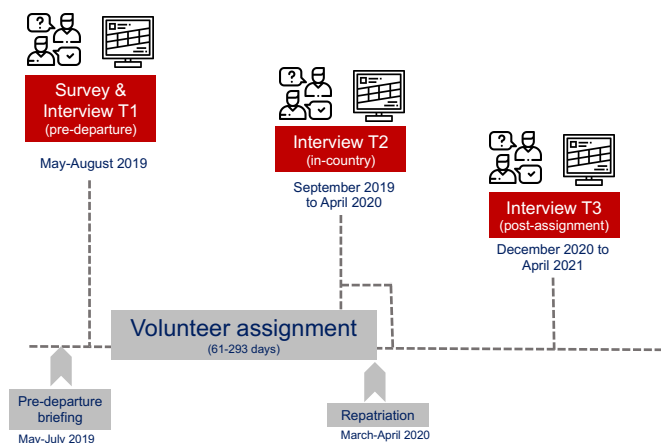
## 1.2 Research Methodology

Fifty-five participants were recruited from four pre-departure briefings (PDBs) between May and July 2019 in accordance with an approved recruitment and engagement strategy.<sup>1</sup> Just one participant withdrew from the study (at T3)<sup>2</sup>, meaning the final sample comprised 54 participants - 49 volunteers and five “approved accompanying dependants” (AADs), a retention rate exceeding 98%. The approved research design 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.

Participants undertook assignments with scheduled durations ranging from 61 to 293 days in 16 countries, hosted by a variety of partner organisations (POs). Numerous statistical comparisons show the LSAV sample to be broadly representative of recent program volunteers.<sup>3</sup>

The data collection process, summarised in **Figure 1**, comprised three interviews across a 24-month period. T1 interviews occurred after PDBs and prior to (or soon after) participants’ assignment deployment. T2 interviews were scheduled immediately prior to the assignment’s intended completion. Because some assignments were truncated by COVID, some T2 interviews were conducted soon after participants’ repatriation to Australia. Final interviews (T3) were conducted approximately 12 months later. T1 interviews were preceded by a brief online survey addressing basic demographic and assignment questions intended to reduce the interview length.<sup>4</sup> Participants also consented to their formal volunteer position description (PD) being examined (n = 49).<sup>5</sup>

**Figure 1: Data collection procedures**



Some pre-COVID interviews were conducted face-to-face; most were mediated electronically (e.g. telephone, Zoom).<sup>6</sup> **Table 1** on the following page summarises the main themes raised at each interview (T1-T3).<sup>7</sup>



**Table 1: Summarised thematic interview schedules (T1-T3)**

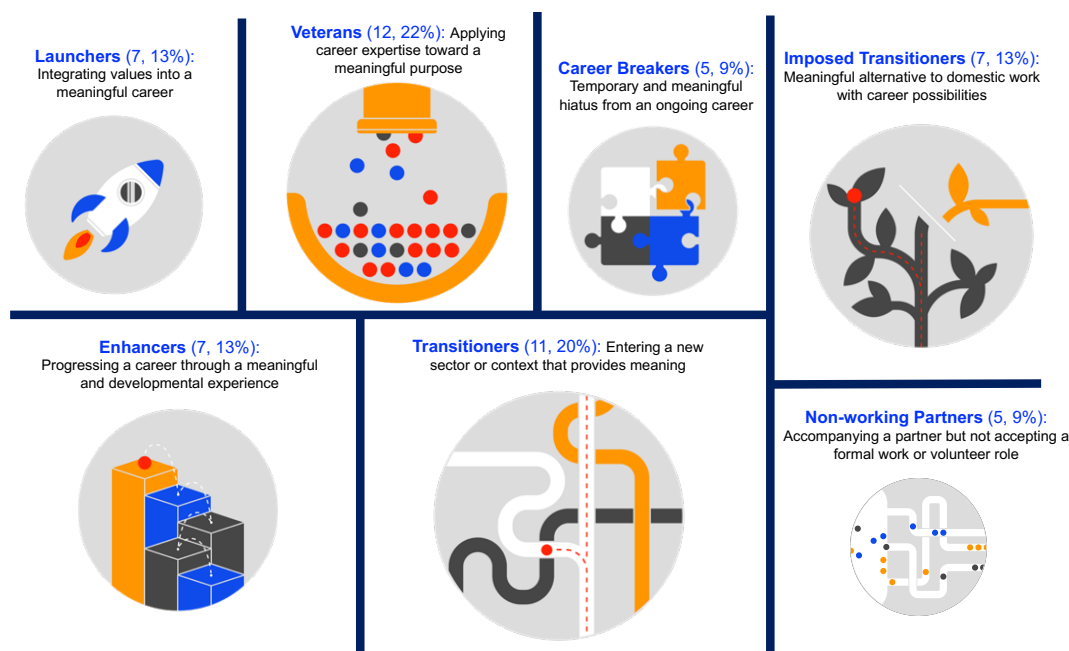
Theme	T1	T2	T3
<b>Personal details:</b> Demographic and background information including motivations for and expectations of the volunteer assignment	X*		
<b>In-country experiences:</b> Anticipated (T1), actual (T2) and reflections on these (T3)	X	X	X
<b>Current situation, capabilities and attitudes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

\* Online survey preceding interview T1

One of the main frames for analysis throughout the study was a classification of volunteer “types” based on the way that participants’ motivations for volunteering intersected with their careers. This typology was developed inductively at *Phase One* and modified during *Phase Two*.<sup>8</sup>

**Figure 2** shows each of the seven volunteer types, the number of participants represented in each category and the percentage of the study’s sample this represents. Where relevant, we use these classifications when discussing the main changes among groups of participants in the analysis that follows in Section 2.

**Figure 2: Typology of volunteers based on motivations to volunteer and career stage**



As with earlier reports, a modified draft version of the report, approved by program staff, was sent to participants for comment and feedback on 15 February 2021. Numerous informal acknowledgements and four formal responses were received. These were discussed with program staff at a sensemaking workshop on 01 March 2022 and, where pertinent, are incorporated into this summary report.

While we are not aware of any participant contracting COVID during the study, the global COVID pandemic disrupted participants’ assignments. All were repatriated in March-April 2021. It also affected participants’ lives after being repatriated (e.g. labour market conditions, lockdowns) and thus the way their involvement in the program shaped them personally and professionally. Where pertinent, we address potential impacts of COVID conditions on the result in the analysis that follows. While these could be mitigated to some extent through amending interview protocols (e.g. seeking to distinguish COVID-related influences from those associated with the assignment) and revising the analytical schedule (e.g. comparing outcomes of repatriated and non-repatriated participants), they could not be fully negated. **For this reason, interpreting the results of the current study must take these atypical factors into account.**





## 2. Key Findings

### 2.1 Civic Participation, Engagement and Literacy

#### » Improvements in “international development” literacy

- **One of the clearest and most consistent (across volunteer types) changes at both T2<sup>9</sup> and T3 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. This is despite generally high levels of knowledge and engagement at pre-departure. It is reasonable to expect most participants to remain informed, active and potentially impactful actors in the sector in coming years.**
- On the whole, the participants’ involvement in the program increased their “international development” literacy, leading most to be more aware of and more informed about international development issues. Most also now have a better appreciation – although not an uncritical view - of international development volunteering and international development generally, including its distinctive features, complexities, challenges, and impacts. A notable shift from T2 is a greater appreciation (at T3) of the multiple objectives of development practice and funding (*‘trade, regional connections, geopolitics’, #55*) and the importance of its contribution to diplomacy (*‘it’s not misplaced ... that’s not a bad thing’, #54*). Fourteen participants (predominantly *Transitioners*) reported deeper appreciation for (and interest in) the geopolitical dimensions of international development. There was also some evidence of the tangible application of this new understanding through participants applying new interest, knowledge and skills to professional and civic roles.
- Most participants across all seven categories were also more engaged with international development issues than they had been prior to their assignments, monitoring news, media reports, social media and/or policy announcements more acutely at T3 than they had at T1.
- **Figure 3** on the following page summarises the main contributors, enablers, outcomes and impacts of the program on participants’ international development literacy. The main box (centre right) highlights the variety of ways that participants’ understanding of the sector was shaped by their assignment. The figure also identifies the features experienced by participants during their assignment that contributed most strongly to their sector understanding (left) and conditions or activities that participants undertook after their assignment that have enabled or facilitated their ongoing understanding of the sector (centre left).

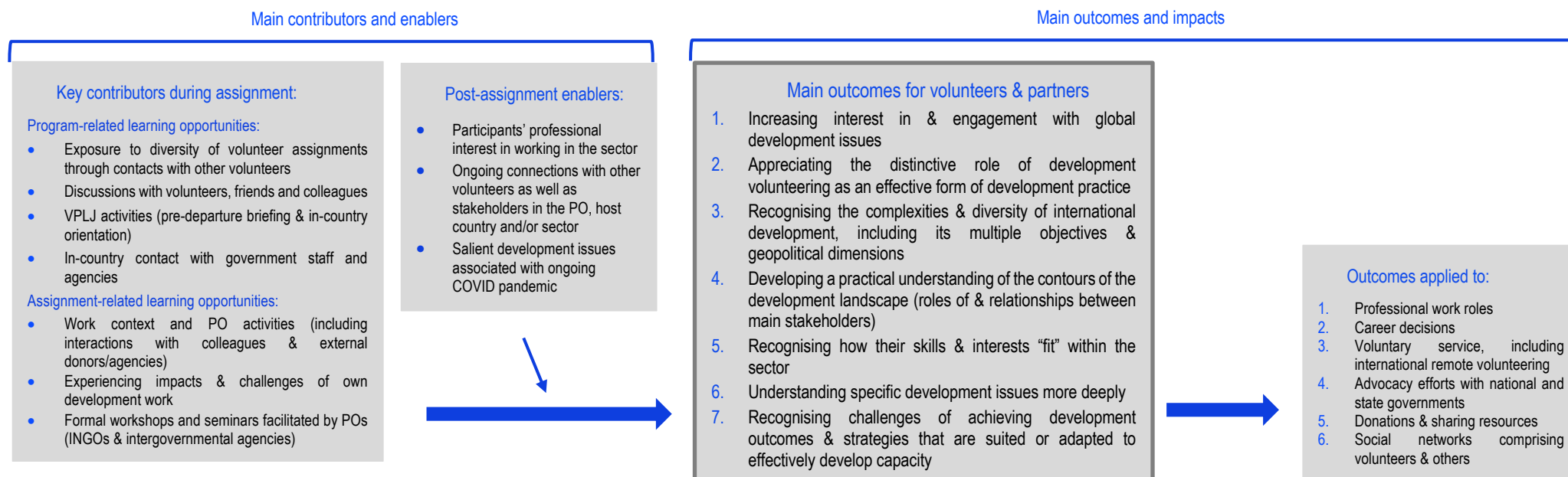
#### » Changing intensity and nature of civic participation

- The bulk of the sample were active participants in civic engagement activities at T1. While this remained high at T3, there was a general decline in the overall intensity of voluntary service that participants performed at T3 compared to T1. For half the participants (27/54) no substantial change occurred. Nine participants (17%)<sup>10</sup> described activities that indicate an increase in civic participation while 18 (33%)<sup>11</sup> experienced a general decline, a pattern attributed to extraneous circumstances, notably the direct and indirect impacts of COVID and related issues such as renewed focus on family, time constraints due to changed commitments, living arrangements, or adjusting to new work. This pattern came against a background of declining civic participation globally and in Australia stemming from COVID.<sup>12</sup> Given this, there is insufficient evidence to indicate a direct impact of the assignment on overall levels of civic participation. Prior studies suggest that overall levels may increase in coming months/years.<sup>13</sup> For this sample, an increase in participation is not yet evident.
- Despite this decline, there is evidence that the program may have triggered some changes in the nature of volunteering<sup>14</sup> leading participants to place greater focus on volunteering oriented towards three areas:
  1. **Orienting volunteering towards international rather than domestic causes** - Fifteen participants oriented their voluntary services more strongly toward international organisations, issues or contexts at T3 than they had at T1.<sup>15</sup> This includes seven whose volunteering energies became focused on remote assignments with international POs, as well as others who sought and commenced (voluntary) positions in internationally-focused professional associations (#28), intergovernmental agencies (#40), working groups (#01) and NGOs (#03) which had explicitly international concerns.
  2. **Participating in skilled rather than unskilled volunteering** – This was reflected through an increased involvement in volunteering activities that utilised participants’ professional experiences, knowledge or skills which participants linked to experiences during their assignments.<sup>16</sup> While some were vague about the reasons for this, increased confidence and capabilities,<sup>17</sup> and enhanced credibility or legitimacy to use their expertise productively as volunteers were all cited as reasons.<sup>18</sup>
  3. **Volunteering that expresses changing values and beliefs** - Nine participants reported shifting their volunteering energies in response to evolving values or beliefs.<sup>19</sup> The most common change was greater appreciation for communitarian voluntary service and community-oriented practices.<sup>20</sup> Others embraced (more strongly) issues such as environmental neglect, pollution, or over-consumption. Yet others began questioning the value of volunteering they had participated in previously, from the negative impacts of using expatriates<sup>21</sup> to the types of organisations (best) able to support capacity development.





**Figure 3: How the program contributes to participants' international development literacy**



**Notes:**

“**Key contributors during assignment**” refers to features experienced by participants during their assignment that contributed most strongly to their improved international development literacy. In general, key contributors 1-4 can be described as “program-related” and so are more strongly influenced by the program and in-country program staff, whereas contributors 5-7 are “assignment-related” and more strongly influenced by the PO and the volunteers’ specific role.

“**Post assignment enablers**” refers to conditions that participants experienced or activities that they engaged in after their assignment that have enabled or facilitated their ongoing understanding of the sector.

“**Main outcomes for volunteers & partners**” refers to the main changes reported by or observed in participants as a result of their involvement in the program. Examples of participants reporting each of these outcomes include:

1. Increasing interest in & engagement with global development issues: Participants #01, #09, #17, #18, #22, #24, #26, #29, #31, #32, #40 and #51.
2. Appreciating the distinctive role of development volunteering as an effective form of development practice: Participants #01, #07, #15, #16, #24, #25, #29, #33, #36, #42, #47, #49 and #52.
3. Recognising the complexities & diversity of international development, including its multiple objectives & geopolitical dimensions: Participants #03, #04, #05, #07, #08, #12, #19, #23, #24, #26, #28, #30, #34, #42, #44, #46, #47, #48, #50, #52, #53 and #55.
4. Developing a practical understanding of the contours of the development landscape (roles of & relationships between main stakeholders): Participants #08, #10, #20, #23, #27, #37, #51 and #53.
5. Recognising how their skills & interests “fit” within the sector: Participants #07, #37 and #51.
6. Understanding specific development issues more deeply: Participants #08, #10, #11, #17, #29 and #52.
7. Recognising challenges of achieving development outcomes & strategies that are suited or adapted to capacity development: Participants #01, #02, #10, #15, #20, #29, #34, #40, #42, #43, #49, #51 and #52.

“**Outcomes applied to**” refers to the situations where participants reported being able to apply their new understanding or changed view of the sector since completing their assignment. Examples of participants reporting each are:

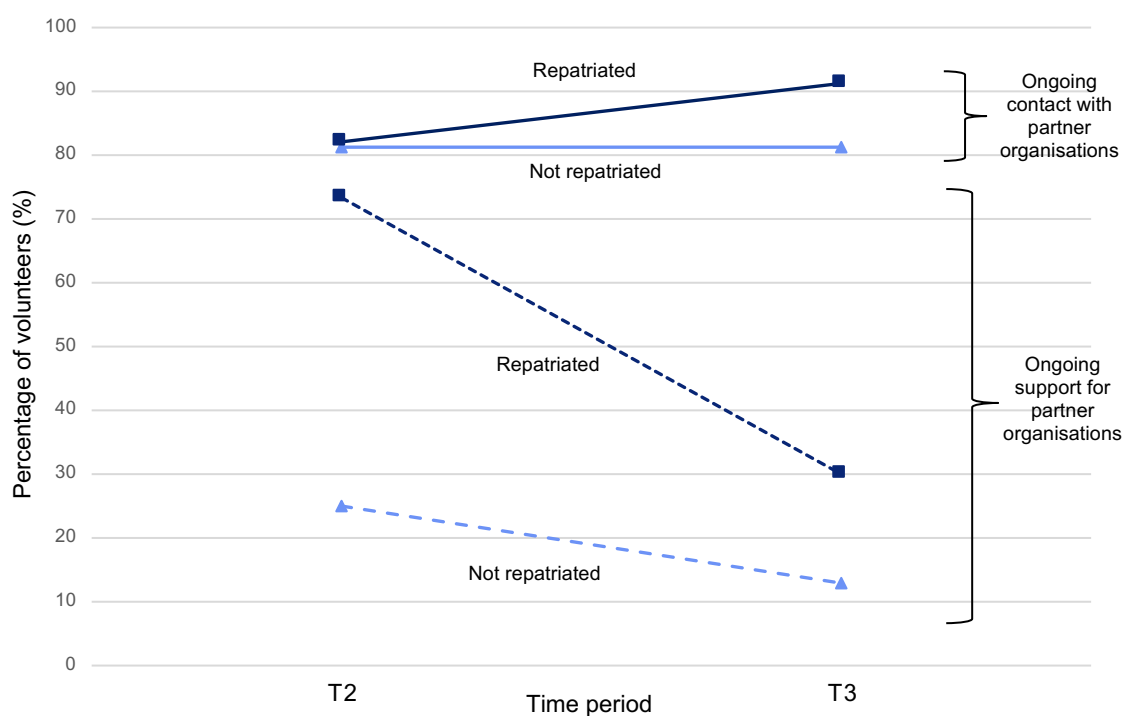
1. Professional work roles: Participants #01, #02, #03, #08, #09, #19, #21, #29, #31, #33, #35, #37, #40 and #46.
2. Career decisions: Participants #02, #03, #04, #08, #09, #19, #28, #37, #40, #51 and #54.
3. Voluntary service, including international remote volunteering: Participants #01, #03, #04, #09, #21, #26, #28, #44, #46 and #49.
4. Advocacy efforts within the community or with national and state governments: Participants #10, #12, #15, #16, #20, #21, #26, #28, #35, #46 and #54.
5. Donations & sharing resources: Participants #08, #12, #15, #22, #29 and #43.

- A variety of unstructured volunteering also occurred at T3 which had not been part of participants' repertoire at T1 and which arose as a result of their involvement in the program. These included teaching languages that had been learned on the assignment, helping others cope during COVID, making and donating clothing items for charity sale, seeking relationships with neighbours from different backgrounds, and sharing goods.<sup>22</sup>
- Viewing participants' civic participation collectively, the unusual circumstances of their return make it difficult to know whether their involvement in and/or advocacy for civic participation reflects their assignment features or other factors; notably, the difficulty of accessing domestic civic engagement opportunities. If sustained, the features of these changes (international, skills-based, values-driven) suggest the potential for more expansive, higher value and more sustainable voluntary service.

#### » Ongoing contact with and support for POs

- Ongoing voluntary support for POs continued at T3 although it too declined across the study period (T2-T3). **Figure 4** compares the percentage of volunteers providing ongoing support for POs at T2 and T3 for two groups of volunteers:<sup>23</sup> those who were repatriated due to COVID ("repatriated") and those who were not ("not repatriated"). It also compares the proportion of each group that continued to have some form of contact with POs at T2 and T3 (without necessarily providing a voluntary contribution).<sup>24</sup> The lower two lines in **Figure 4** show a general decline in support from T2 to T3 for both groups, although the proportion of repatriated volunteers supporting POs was higher at both points in time. Much of this support is not formalised and comprises part of a "hidden" discretionary contribution that volunteers have made to POs (before and during, as well as after their assignment). The types of informal support that volunteers provided POs in this period varied. Several helped POs until they were able to finish a project or specific activity/task that they had started before being repatriated. Others provided advice or feedback in response to ad-hoc questions, regular mentor-style discussions, or specific tasks like reviewing grant applications, preparing COVID emergency documents, helping develop relationships with Australian organisations, teaching English and writing résumés.<sup>25</sup> **It is estimated that support to POs amounted to around 174 months of voluntary contribution in the period T2-T3, 73 months or 42% of which was informal.**<sup>26</sup>
- Ongoing contact with POs remained high and relatively stable among both groups and actually rose for repatriated volunteers from T2 to T3 (top two lines in **Figure 4**).<sup>27</sup> While contact was continued, the level and regularity of exchanges varied, were mainly personal and informal (see Section 3) and tended to decline from T2 to T3.
- **Figure 4** indicates that support for POs at T3 was higher amongst those who had been repatriated, despite a sharp decline from T2. *Veterans* and *Launchers* – especially those who were unaccompanied on their assignments - were the groups most likely to continue supporting POs.<sup>28</sup> Unsurprisingly, ongoing contact and support appears to have been an anchor for stronger cognitive and emotional engagement with the host country. Participants whose assignments were in rural locations and with "local" POs (domestic NGOs, government agencies) reported higher incidence of ongoing support.<sup>29</sup>

**Figure 4: Comparisons of ongoing PO relationships (repatriated and non-repatriated volunteers)**



## » Future international volunteering (in-country and remote)

- At T3, 42 of the 49 volunteers (86%) reported being open to either a remote assignment or an in-country assignment at some stage in the future. Nineteen volunteers (49%) had acted upon or were open to **both** a remote **and** an in-country volunteer assignment.<sup>30</sup> Just seven reported not considering either.<sup>31</sup> A moderate correlation ( $r = 0.45$ ) existed between attitudes towards remote and in-country volunteering, suggesting that the cohorts for these two forms of volunteering overlap but may have important distinctions. While interest in both forms of volunteering is reasonably strong, we are unable to claim a direct impact from the program.
- In-country international volunteering opportunities were curtailed by border closures, directly affecting 15 participants who had extended their current assignments or were in various stages of preparing for a follow-up volunteer assignment with the program or other agencies.<sup>32</sup> Thirty-two volunteers<sup>33</sup> and three of the five *Non-working Partners* (69%) expressed openness to a future in-country assignment – most prominently *Veterans*, *Enhancers* and *Launchers*. Four (9%) had already commenced or applied for an assignment at T3.<sup>34</sup> Just eight stated that they would not consider another in-country assignment, including three of the five *Career Breakers*. Meanwhile, just under half (44%) saw remote volunteering as a viable option for their civic engagement 12 months at T3. A quarter (25%) had applied for, commenced, or completed a remote volunteer assignment; 16% of these assignments were still underway at T3.<sup>35</sup> An additional 19% of participants were open to undertaking a remote assignment.

## 2.1.1 Supporting Volunteers' Ongoing Civic Participation, Engagement and Literacy



### » Improving volunteers' international development literacy

- The contribution of the program to volunteers' international development literacy and engagement is consistent with studies of similar cohorts in multiple contexts.<sup>36</sup> For the large number of volunteers wanting to enter or transition to employment in the field of international development (primarily *Launchers* and *Transitioners*), the program offers the potential of a firm grounding. At the same time, not all assignments offered the experiences, organisational settings and roles that were identified as most beneficial. **Figure 3** provides an overview of the main features that provide opportunities for volunteers to develop their international development literacy. Value is likely to come from continuing efforts to match volunteers to assignments that best allow those with pre-defined aims to benefit from these opportunities.
- Participants' deeper appreciation for (and interest in) international development issues (including the geopolitical dimensions of international development or debates relating to decolonisation of aid/development) are largely consistent with other studies of volunteer programs.<sup>37</sup> Topics like these that generated interest and learning during assignments may serve as helpful connection points to post-assignment experiences (e.g. VPLJ activities) that can aim to continue volunteers' development and engagement with these issues and with the program.

### » Facilitating the civic participation and engagement of returned volunteers

- The atypical features of participants' return to Australia (closure of some community organisations, restrictions on movement, lockdowns, and lack of permanent accommodation or work/income) appear to have influenced some patterns of civic participation, including lower rates of volunteering generally and higher levels of remote volunteering and/or support for POs than might otherwise have been the case. Nonetheless, the findings suggest that different groups of volunteers may prefer and/or seek different benefits from different modalities of volunteering (e.g. hybrid remote/in-country assignments).
- We see benefit in the program considering ways to configure remote or hybrid assignments in ways that retain the meaning, enjoyment and learning that appear to make in-country assignments attractive and developmental to volunteers. A necessary starting point to support these volunteers' performance and development is a clear understanding of what motivates these volunteers, and the features making these assignments developmental.
- Two emerging patterns of volunteering, if continued,<sup>38</sup> could reasonably be expected to reap high value, sustainable and expansive civic contributions with the potential to lead to better impacts relative to pre-assignment levels. These come from volunteers' stronger focus on skilled, values-aligned and international civic participation at T3, and their ongoing and self-directed support for POs and other recipients in the host country that volunteers discretionarily established during their assignments. While trade-offs may exist<sup>39</sup>, the nature of this civic participation, and the intrinsic motivations which underpin it, have the potential to result in improved impacts for host communities, and greater engagement and development for volunteers.



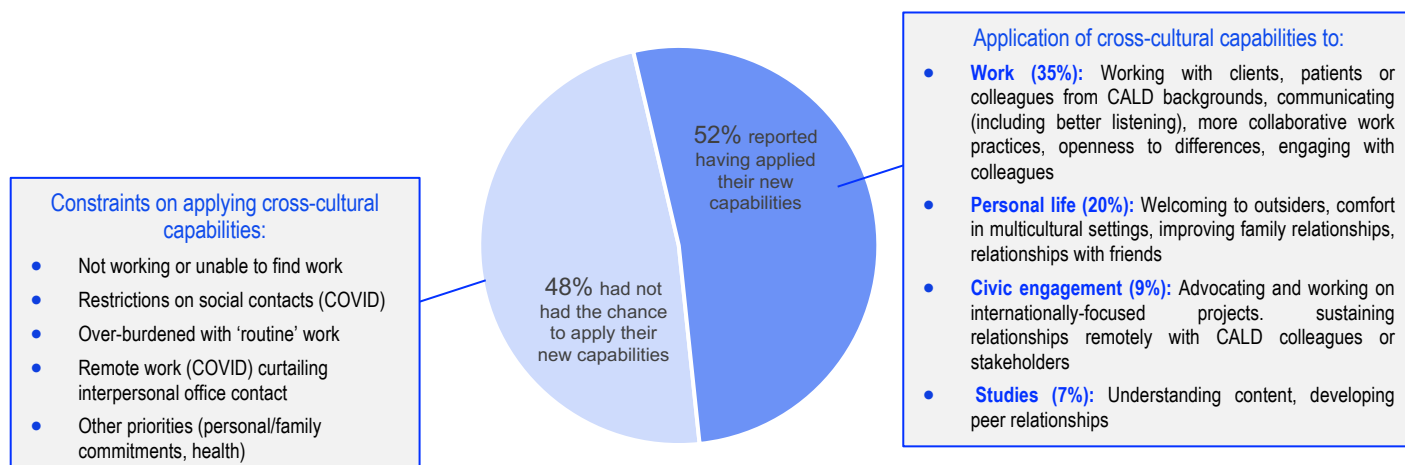
## 2.2 Global Literacy and Connections

### » Cross-cultural knowledge and capabilities

- All participants identified knowledge, capabilities or awareness which they had developed during their volunteer assignment that falls within the program's objectives to improve volunteers' global literacy. Several have incorporated their newly acquired host-country/region expertise into their work and career plans.
- **While great variation existed, all 54 respondents felt that their assignment had contributed directly to noticeably better understanding of some aspect of the host country and its culture.** The in-country experiences that contributed most strongly to this were participants' immersion in the local culture and their (work) collaborations or (unstructured) discussions with HCNs.<sup>40</sup> Thus, participants' willingness and opportunity to interact with HCNs – a feature that the design of some volunteer positions - contributed directly to them developing host-country knowledge and capabilities.
- Participants' use of and interest in the host-country language fluctuated. In-country language training was perceived as a valuable component of the VPLJ<sup>41</sup> and seen as valuable during the assignment. Yet few participants without a background in the language continued to develop or use these skills post-assignment.
- For a smaller number of participants, there is evidence of the assignment instigating more transformational changes to their culture-general capabilities and outlook. Of the 54 participants who reported improved *culture-specific* knowledge and capabilities (relating to their host country), just over half (28, 52%) articulated new insights, awareness, interest or capabilities that they developed, and which reflect a broader "global" perspective beyond the specific context of their assignment. All 28 attributed these changes to the current volunteer assignment despite most having plentiful prior international work or travel experiences. These generally fell in to two types which we label "behavioural flexibility" and "global mindset."
- "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 made them better collaborators, communicators<sup>42</sup> and/or relationship builders<sup>43</sup> (e.g. establishing trust and rapport with different stakeholders, explaining things simply, listening more carefully, giving and eliciting feedback). These changes were linked to opportunities during the assignment to interact or collaborate with HCNs and to volunteers' own adjustment processes,<sup>44</sup> often in non-work settings.<sup>45</sup>
- Participants from all seven categories (most commonly *Enhancers* and *Imposed Transitioners*) reported various outcomes relating to being able to view people, groups, situations, or events more holistically, empathetically and/or flexibly.<sup>46</sup> We collectively label these "global mindset."<sup>47</sup> The data indicate a combination of features contributed to participants' ability to convert their intercultural experiences to a more global outlook. These include personal factors (e.g. past experiences in the country), support (e.g. PDB content), context (e.g. access to networks), and assignment (e.g. performing "mentor" role).
- A related outcome is the large number of participants (79%)<sup>48</sup> reporting that their assignment changed their view about Australia or being an Australian.<sup>49</sup> Most (78%) of these changes could be viewed as broadly positive: for instance, feeling greater pride in being Australian, appreciating Australia's lifestyle, environment, or acceptance of differences/minorities, and – most frequently – increased gratitude towards the country's political, educational or health structures. As well different views on Australia, at least 11 participants (20%)<sup>50</sup> saw direct links between parts of their assignment and how issues of disadvantage, inequity, capacity development or cross-cultural awareness related to (participants' understandings of) the experiences of Indigenous Australians. For most of these participants, this connection was based on their experiences working with Indigenous colleagues, customers, or communities, either prior to the assignment<sup>51</sup> or since returning.<sup>52</sup> Four<sup>53</sup> found parallels between their interactions with HCNs during the assignment (rural East Asia and Pacific) and Indigenous Australian clients in their current work (T3). Five participants<sup>54</sup> had instigated or applied for positions that involve directing their expertise toward services for Indigenous Australians and/or disadvantaged minorities, feeling their experiences had made them more effective working with these groups.
- The data suggest that a more global mindset may also be associated with other beneficial outcomes in participants, including seeing parallels between parts of their assignment and how issues of disadvantage, inequity, capacity development or cross-cultural awareness related to (participants' understandings of) the experiences of Indigenous Australians.<sup>55</sup> Two related changes, not evident in the dataset at T2, were surprisingly widespread at T3: increased "empathy"<sup>56</sup>, – or being willing and able to understand (in a non-judgmental way) the thoughts, motives and/or feelings of the others, and the reasons behind these<sup>57</sup> - and greater awareness of their social privilege and systematic advantage ("privilege awareness").<sup>58</sup>
- **Figure 5** shows the proportion of participants who, at T3, had had opportunities to apply cross-cultural capabilities developed on the program to different aspects of their lives. As it shows, just over half the sample (28 participants, 52%) reported applying their new cultural acumen in the 12 months since completing the assignment – most commonly in workplaces (35% of participants) or their personal lives (20%), as well as civic engagement and studies (right-side of **Figure 5**). This was despite several barriers that limited their opportunities, including not working and restrictions on their social and work interactions (indicated on the left of **Figure 5**).<sup>59</sup> Capabilities associated with "behavioural flexibility" were those that participants reported most frequently as beneficial in their work and life since completing their assignment.



**Figure 5: Participants' use of cross-cultural capabilities since completing their assignment**



#### » Ongoing engagement with host country

- Although most participants had limited interest in the host country (and in many cases the region) before the recruitment process began, twelve months after the completion of their assignment all but four reported some form of ongoing engagement with their host country. The behaviours of over one third of these<sup>60</sup> could be classified as highly engaged with the host country, region, and/or both, as evident through practices like actively continuing to monitor events with heightened interest, feeling positive affect and/or emotional bonds with the country, having emotional connections with one or more HCNs, and/or expressing a professional or personal identity tied to the country. Four participants were seeking to return to the host country to work while another had already returned.<sup>61</sup>
- To keep abreast of issues in the host country, participants typically use social media (WhatsApp chats or Facebook feeds with friends or groups in the host country). While ongoing interest stems largely from events surrounding COVID, other variables associated with high levels of host-country engagement include:<sup>62</sup> having an outward orientation, cross-cultural skills to support this (especially related to the host country), and an assignment that provides opportunities for work and non-work contact with HCNs.

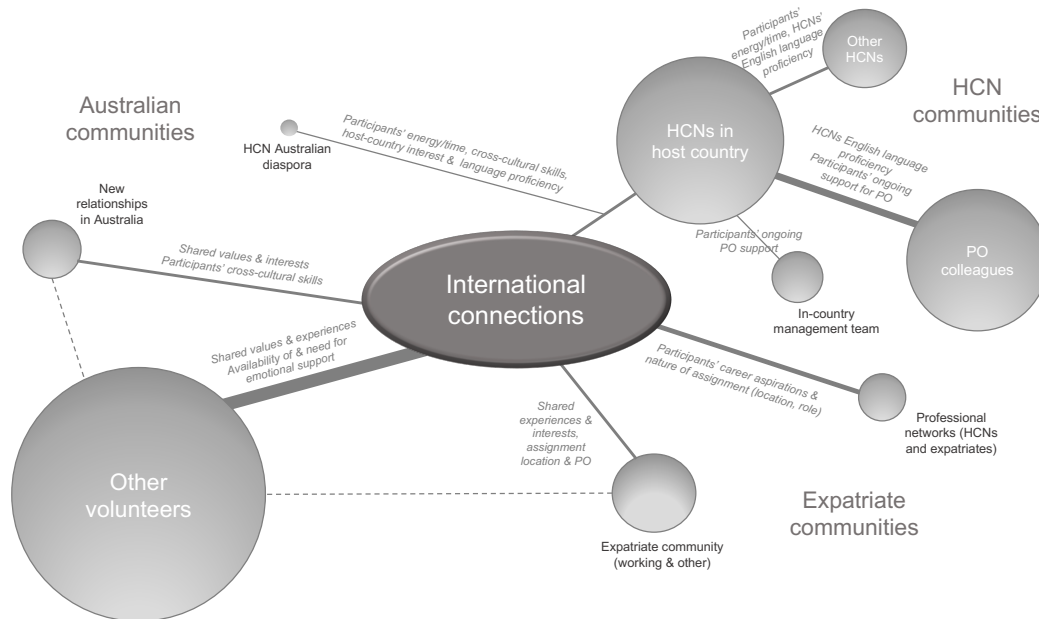
#### » Global networks and connections

- A prominent finding of the study is the strength and global breadth of new and internationally-focused relationships that volunteers are exposed to and develop during their assignments. Almost all participants felt that their involvement with the program contributed to them being more globally connected, although the strength and diversity of some networks is limited, in part attributable to COVID.
- **Figure 6** visualises the main sets of connections that participants developed that have international dimensions. It shows three broad groups: (i) HCN communities (top right), (ii) other expatriate communities in the host country or region (bottom right) and (iii) Australian communities (left). The size of each circle in **Figure 6** reflects the relative number of participants reporting it.<sup>63</sup> The thickness of the connecting lines represents the strength of each connection (e.g. frequency of contact, emotional investment in the relationship). Labels on these connectors indicate the features that strengthened each set of networks.
- Participants' relationships with other volunteers, the most prominent and important single group in **Figure 6**, are discussed in Section 2.4, while their professional networks are discussed in Section 2.3.
- At T3, all but five participants had continued to maintain some form of social connection with individuals or groups from the host country (49/54, 91%)<sup>64</sup>, more than triple that at T1 (15/54, 28%). Of those with ongoing networks, 22 (41%) are "strong" (regular contact and intentions to maintain this) while eight (15%) are "moderate" (more than episodic) and 19 (35%) are "weak" (only at special events, like New Year or national celebrations) but ongoing. Eighty-eight percent of volunteers (43/49) had sustained some meaningful ongoing contact with colleagues in POs. The bulk of participants' ongoing relationships with POs are sustained through personal (rather than professional) exchanges and via social media. Eight participants (15%) also reported some ongoing connection with the program's in-country management team.
- While the frequency and intensity of contact with HCN friends and colleagues did decline across the study period for many volunteers, the connections that were strongest and most enduring (i.e. regular, deep and sustained contact) were with former work colleagues, and in particular with designated counterparts from the PO.<sup>65</sup> Among the features of the relationship and context that supported more regular contact were competence in a common language, most frequently HCNs' English language capabilities<sup>66</sup>, and ongoing mutual interest in the impacts of COVID, which was frequently a reason for contact being initiated.<sup>67</sup>





**Figure 6: Type and strength of participants' international connections**



- Connections and knowledge exchanges between host countries and Australia have been strengthened and have facilitated ongoing information exchanges that contribute to awareness and knowledge about the host country (and Australia). This has been propelled by events like COVID. These relationships and the exchanges, while relatively “weak ties” for most participants, provide a platform for deeper and different forms of exchange, including ongoing PO support. Factors that facilitate productive exchanges are participants’ base level of knowledge and interest in the host country, deep contact with HCNs in-country, and the utility of social media to nourish the connections. Thus, **the data also indicate that the program does assist in “promot(ing) cultural understanding through connecting people.”**<sup>68</sup>
- Participants in urban areas, in certain destinations<sup>69</sup>, and working in internationally staffed POs (INGOs, intergovernmental agencies) reported stronger expatriate networks. Some connections to expatriate communities were facilitated via other volunteers (represented by the dashed horizontal line in **Figure 6**). As with HCNs, contact with expatriates tended to decline from T2 to T3.
- A feature of the connections that participants developed during the program (and have sustained since) is the abundant use of social media like Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, and Telegram to remain connected with POs, friends and volunteers. As a relatively low threshold technology that can connect people who share interests, social media offers great potential to support the program’s global networks and amplify participants’ contributions well beyond their in-country experiences. As **Figure 7** shows, participants used social media during and after their assignment to **inform** (accessing and sharing news), **connect** (exchanging salutations and updates), **advocate** (promoting issues, including those relating to their assignments), and **coordinate** (organising events and protests).

**Figure 7: Patterns of social media use and benefits**



## 2.2.1 Supporting Volunteers' Ongoing Global Literacy and Connections



### » Strengthening volunteers' host-country engagement, connections and knowledge

- Increasing access to and use of social media, especially among host-country communities, has the potential to transform the global connections that participants develop and the benefits of this – in both directions. Participants gained information, joy, professional opportunities, satisfaction and/or emotional sustenance from these exchanges. We are cautious about suggesting the program seek to manage these interactions in any way. However, research into how host communities and POs perceive, manage and respond to their interactions with volunteers via social media would help the program (and volunteers) better understand the full impacts of these exchanges and to support both sides to benefit from its utility.
- The results in this and other sections highlight the learning and development benefits of volunteers having a strong prior knowledge of, interest in, or engagement with, host countries. The relative impact of this may have been exacerbated for this sample because so many assignments were truncated by COVID, reducing the time participants had to develop this foundation in country. Nonetheless, this finding does suggest that the earlier participants develop a baseline comfort in the host country, the more personally and professionally developmental their experiences can be.

### » Helping volunteers broaden their global outlook

- The depth and extent of contact that volunteers had with HCNs is a central contributor to many of the outcomes reported in this section, including enhancing culture-specific and culture-general knowledge and capabilities, host country engagement, and ongoing connections with host-country communities. The evidence suggests that the program's distinctive design and support mechanisms make a valuable contribution to these outcomes. That is, while much valuable contact with HCNs occurred outside work and outside the program's auspices, the theory of change that undergirds the program – i.e. person-to-person relationships and interpersonal capacity development – and the VPLJ activities that support it<sup>70</sup> are likely important contributors to this outcome. Volunteers are therefore likely to benefit from VPLJ activities that raise their awareness of these patterns and help volunteers to learn from these interactions, and from assignments that provide opportunities for HCN contact conducive to learning.

### » Supporting volunteers' global connections

- Interest in host-country languages declined rapidly after the assignment. At present, most connections between volunteers and HCNs are sustained by HCNs' English language capabilities, even for those relationships in which volunteers continue to support POs.<sup>71</sup> While language training was beneficial to participants' assignments,<sup>72</sup> few without a background in the language continued to develop or use these skills post-assignment. Considering ways to support participants with an interest in continuing to learn and use their nascent (host-country) language capabilities is one way to continue their global literacy and buttress their connections with HCNs.
- On balance, the relative lack of expatriate networks among participants with international objectives (combined with the strong career emphasis of many participants) suggest potential benefits in diversifying and strengthening volunteers' access to "bridging capital" – that is, more expansive "outward-focused" ties with those who differ in identity or profession.<sup>73</sup>

### » Supporting volunteers' efforts to transfer their cross-cultural acumen to Australian settings

- How effectively volunteers were able to transfer their motivations and skills to domestic setting with disadvantaged or minority groups, including Indigenous Australians and Australians from CALD backgrounds, could not be assessed. Nonetheless, the responses indicate that involvement in the program exposes volunteers to issues of inequity and discrimination in host countries that have (in their view) parallels in Australia. In some cases, VPLJ activities introduced or reinforced concepts and practices that, combined with their experiences, helped volunteers to understand these issues differently. The program also contributed to a more nuanced "outsider's" view of social issues in their own country, at least among some. It also seems to have been the impetus for some volunteers to return to Australia with (renewed) motivation to direct their energies (and new cross-cultural awareness) toward domestic inequality/social issues. Building on this, we see great potential benefit in the program being strategic in how it supports volunteers to recognise these parallels and to assist volunteers who are interested to develop pathways that allow them to apply their energies and skills toward these endeavours.





## 2.3 Career Progression and Professional Capabilities

### » Career progression and employment status

- Professionally, most participants who sought work after their assignment had found employment by T3 although, mainly due to COVID disruptions, some participants were forced to accept jobs outside their preferred career track. Perhaps more pertinently, some participants who had not found employment – including some whose main purpose in volunteering was for career benefit - experienced career setbacks.
- **Table 2** summarises participants' employment status prior to (T1) and 12 months after (T3) their volunteer assignment. It shows a general increase in employment and a decline in unemployment, despite the impediments created by COVID. Nonetheless, 31% of those employed at T3 (9/29) were working in “plan B” jobs not directly related to their preferred profession, either part-time (4) or full-time (5).<sup>74</sup> Just one of the 22 participants seeking international careers had returned overseas to work at T3.

**Table 2: Participants' employment status (T1-T3)**

Employment status	T1 n (%)	T3 n (%)	Notes
Employed (full-time)	21 (39)	24 (44)	At T1, seven were working internationally, including three on volunteer assignments to which they were returning; three others had jobs to return to in Australia at the completion of their assignment. At T3, one had returned to work overseas, three were waiting to accept overseas job offers, and two were employed on remote international projects; many others had roles with strong international dimensions. Five had jobs that were outside their main professional interest as 'plan B' careers.
Employed (part-time)	0 (0)	5 (9)	Four of those working part-time at T3 were seeking full-time work (two worked multiple jobs). Three of these were <i>Launchers</i> , only one of whom was working in their preferred professional field. All four seeking full-time work at T3 were not working at T1 (i.e. student or unemployed).
Student (full-time)	6 (11)	2 (4)	At T3, in addition to two full-time students, three participants were enrolled in part-time study. Several others had completed formal studies between T2 and T3. Just one participant was studying at both T1 and T3, having enrolled in a PG degree program based on their in-country experiences.
Unemployed (seeking work)	11 (20)	6 (11)	Just two of the 11 participants unemployed at T1 remained unemployed at T3; one of these had been offered an international role but been unable to accept it due to border closures. One participant was unable to work at T3 for health reasons.
Not working (retired)	16 (30)	17 (31)	At T3, three retirees (all <i>Veterans</i> ) were working part-time and another was seeking part-time work. One <i>Imposed Transitioner</i> (T1) retired upon return to Australia (T3).

- At T3, just under half the participants (24/54, 44%) had had their careers impacted by their participation in the program; for three quarters of these (18/24), that impact was positive. When *Non-working Partners* and *Veterans* are excluded<sup>75</sup>, **nearly half of the volunteers in the study (18/38, 47%) had achieved a positive career benefit from their assignment within 12 months of it finishing.** This included 8/13 participants who identified “career” as their primary motivation for volunteering in the program.
- Although not as overwhelming positive as other studies of international development volunteers,<sup>76</sup> the career outcomes of this cohort are generally impressive in light of the very large impact of COVID on many participants' future plans, many of which had a strong international focus, and the career-related objectives of many participants when entering the program (Figure 2). The data indicate that involvement in the program can be beneficial to volunteers' careers and in a reasonably short space of time.
- Compared to participants' whose assignments were detrimental or not beneficial, participants who benefitted most were more likely to be younger, female, *Launchers*, with career motivations and pre-existing expertise or interest in the host-country. Their assignments were more likely to incorporate a designated “mentoring” role in the job title and be in an international NGO. Importantly, at T3 these participants were more likely to believe the assignment enhanced their professional reputation, legitimacy and networks, and to report developing and applying domain-specific knowledge and capabilities. They were also more likely to continue being involved in voluntary service, including support for the PO, after their assignments. In short, it seems that those whose careers benefitted most from their assignments were actively applying their expertise in paid and unpaid contributions in the 12 months since completing their assignments.
- Twelve volunteers entered the program expecting and hoping to accrue career benefits that were not realised.<sup>77</sup> Six others experienced a “career setback,”<sup>78</sup> including two whose primary motivation for entering the program was “career.”<sup>79</sup> Several of these participants emerged from their assignment with professional precarity, although most (but not all) found some employment.<sup>80</sup> The primary reasons for career setbacks encompassed combinations of extraneous post-assignment challenges (COVID limiting work opportunities, which directly impacted 4/6), pre-existing health conditions (affecting 2/6), as well as features of the assignment (a volunteer role that differed from the one they had expected it to be at T1) and PO (not



having a well-known name and so not valued by potential employers). Common experiences among this group were: difficult transitions following repatriation (e.g. 5/6 sought counselling) and generally mixed or negative in-country experiences (including major medical incidents). *Transitioners* were the group who found the program least beneficial to their careers, with more than half not benefitting or finding it detrimental to their career.<sup>81</sup>

#### » “Prosocial” career transitions

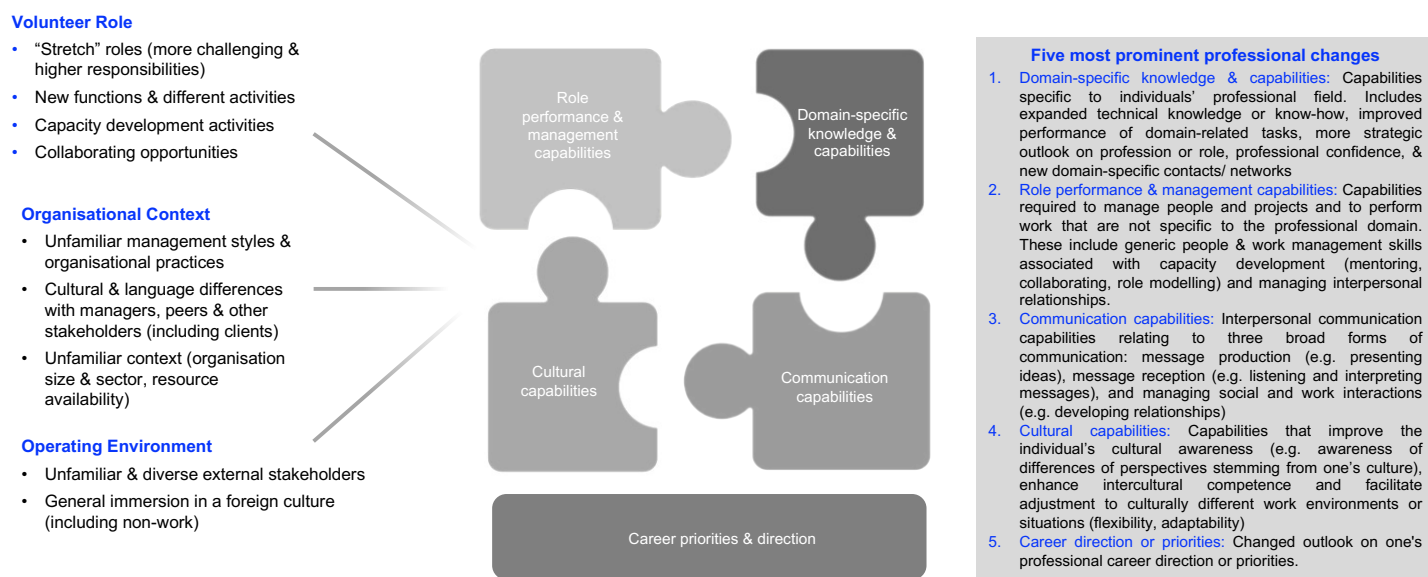
- At T1, 19 participants<sup>82</sup> were unambiguous about **both**: (i) being motivated to volunteer by potential career benefits that their assignment would offer, **and** (ii) having a desire to use their assignment to transition in some way to a career that had a stronger “prosocial” orientation<sup>83</sup> (i.e. motivated, at least in part, by a desire to help others and produce beneficial social or environmental impacts). The bulk of these were *Imposed Transitioners*, *Transitioners*, and *Launchers*. Nine more<sup>84</sup> 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 “test the waters” or explore the viability of a possible shift. Jointly, these 28 participants make up a cross-cutting group of “**prosocial career seekers**” that comprised 52% of all participants across all volunteer groups except *Veterans* and *Non-working Partners*. This amounts to 88% of participants who identified any career-related motivations for joining the program at T1, and almost three quarters (74%) of all participants who were expecting to have careers after their assignment.<sup>85</sup>
- By T3, at least 14 participants – 12 of whom were identified as prosocial career seekers - had achieved a prosocial career transition. Health sector workers were over-represented in this group.<sup>86</sup> The data also suggest that some in-country features may have helped facilitate (or motivate) these transitions: working in POs with international staff and foci (INGOs and intergovernmental agencies), performing “mentoring” roles, and developing both international development literacy capabilities (Section 2.2) and career-related networks (Section 2.3).<sup>87</sup> Those who successfully made a prosocial transition were also more likely to have been inspired by their experiences to undertake a program of study after their assignment.<sup>88</sup>
- Conversely, 16 of the prosocial career seekers (30% of all participants) had not, by T3, achieved the desired transition, and therefore one of their main aims in volunteering through the program was left unfulfilled.<sup>89</sup> This was most common among *Transitioners*, *Enhancers* and *Launchers*, many of whom had resigned from prior employment to accept their assignments (T1). Five of these who did not achieve the desired transition (9%)<sup>90</sup> identified “career” interests as their main reason for entering the program (T1), although it was the unexpected disruption of COVID rather than shortcomings in their program experiences that most strongly curtailed the career aspirations of these four. **In sum, of the 16 participants who sought but were unable to achieve a “prosocial career transition” by T3, nine were directly disrupted by COVID (“COVID career casualties”) and five returned to their previous employment, albeit reluctantly and with detrimental impact for some.**

#### » Developing and applying professional capabilities

- An important finding across T2 and T3 of the LSAV was the breadth of professional development outcomes that participants associated with a variety of personal, interpersonal, cross-cultural and domain-specific experiences in and out of their workplace. Three groups of volunteers – *Launchers*, *Imposed Transitioners* and *Enhancers* – identified professional/career changes as the major impacts of their volunteer assignment. It is also clear that volunteers’ careers and professional capabilities benefitted from developing “soft skills” that support communication, relationships, and problem-solving more strongly they did from developing technical, domain-specific knowledge and capabilities.
- The areas of professional developmental most frequently reported at T3 fell into five broad outcome categories. Four of these relate to professional knowledge and capabilities that contribute to the performance of their work: (i) “domain-specific knowledge and capabilities”,<sup>91</sup> (ii) “role performance and management capabilities”,<sup>92</sup> (iii) “communication capabilities”,<sup>93</sup> and (iv) “cultural capabilities”.<sup>94</sup> The fifth is “career direction or priorities”,<sup>95</sup> which resulted in participants having a new outlook on or attitude towards their professional career. These five outcomes are represented by the five shapes on the centre of **Figure 8**. Each is defined in the box on the right. **Figure 8** also identifies, on the left, the main features of the volunteer role, organisational context and operating environment to which participants attributed their professional development.<sup>96</sup>
- The question of whether participants’ domain-specific knowledge and capabilities (top right of **Figure 8**) benefitted is equivocal. Thirty-seven participants (69%) believed that their involvement with the program contributed to these in some way, although for a third of these participants (11, 20%) the benefit was relatively modest. Excluding *Non-Working Partners*, whose assignments involved no or few professional activities,<sup>97</sup> almost three-quarters (73%) of participants found the assignment offered some contribution to their domain-specific expertise; for just over a half, the contribution was strong.



Figure 8: Overview of main professional changes and their causes



- Enhanced “domain-specific knowledge and capabilities” was stronger among participants with career-related motivations and objectives geared towards future international work (T1), and stronger host-country knowledge and experiences (T1).<sup>98</sup> Participants in Health and Community/Social Development – two of the most in-demand sectors from POs<sup>99</sup> - were generally most likely to develop domain-specific capabilities, while those from Engineering/Architecture fields were least likely; the reasons for the discrepancy is unclear from the data. Consistent with the learning outcomes reported at T2,<sup>100</sup> the groups of volunteers who, at T3, believed their domain-specific capabilities had benefitted most were *Imposed Transitioners*, *Launchers* and *Enhancers* (each 6/7), and *Transitioners* (9/11). *Career Breakers* (1/5), whose assignments were generally briefer, and *Veterans* (8/12), were least likely to observe benefits.
- Taken collectively, the variety, novelty and challenge offered by volunteer assignments are well positioned to contribute important professional capabilities, especially interpersonal and “soft skills.” Relative to domestic workplaces, “domain-specific knowledge and capabilities” are where volunteers appear to receive least benefit; indeed, the responses of some participants suggest a regression. Thus, while some impressive professional learning was reported overall, there is not strong evidence from this sample that the program was more beneficial to volunteers’ technical capabilities than other “jobs.” **Although the program does offer opportunities for some volunteers to “gain valuable career experience and skills through international volunteering”, the extent and value of skills and experiences varied.**<sup>101</sup>
- Aside from capabilities, 10 participants<sup>102</sup> felt their professional reputation or legitimacy was enhanced by their assignment. This was mainly attributed to the international dimension of the work, (performing a new or more expansive role, or having experience ‘in the field’). A larger proportion of women reported this than men. While *Career Breakers* (3/5) were most likely to report legitimacy benefits, *Launchers* and those with desires on international careers were more likely to highlight the benefits of practical field experience.
- At the same time, as with T2, some participants felt that collaborations with and learning from other professionals or experts was constrained. While “stretch” roles involving unfamiliar or higher levels of responsibilities were common, some participants’ lack of access to expert collaborators or role models meant that features of their assignment were less developmental than they may have been.<sup>103</sup> This was most common in domestic NGOs where participants could be asked to ‘be a bit of an allrounder.’
- Sixteen participants reported having begun applying their new domain-specific knowledge and capabilities in the workplace or studies since completing their assignment,<sup>104</sup> while 29<sup>105</sup> (94% of employed workers and students) reported applying other capabilities identified in **Figure 8**, most commonly “role performance and management capabilities.” In short, **almost all participants who found post-assignment employment identified ways that they had made use of some new professional knowledge or capabilities within the first year of completing their assignment.**
- The findings also indicate that international volunteering is a powerful mechanism to consolidate and extend prior formal education, as well as a potent impetus that inspires or guides the direction of further education. In both cases, participants’ experiences on assignment provided a learning “premium” to the experience of their formal educational program. Specifically, 11 participants (including five *Launchers*), developed a better or different understanding of *prior* formal education through experiencing it “in practice” during their assignment. This was closely linked to their pre-assignment career aspirations, which



influenced their decision to volunteer and/or the assignment choice. The unfamiliar context provided during the assignment (e.g. global setting, international development ecosystem) were important contributors.

- For 17 participants, volunteering provided the inspiration or guidance for future formal education that they commended *after* their assignment. This was mainly done to facilitate a career direction that was sparked by an experience during the assignment. Disaster risk management, public health, and education were fields of study chosen by multiple participants. The triggers for this varied, but included, for instance, exposure to experts in the field (e.g. observing the skillsets of effective actors, discussions with experts about emerging areas) or introduction to a new passion/interest (sometimes by being asked to perform a new role). For others, exposure to industry expectations and norms led them to develop requisite expertise or achieve formal accreditation. In some cases, studies related to distinctive features of the local culture and/or the cross-cultural application of their professional training or backgrounds.<sup>106</sup>

#### » Professional networks

- Participants' connections with practitioners, stakeholders and mentors from their professional areas were relatively limited, especially for volunteers in remote locations and in local (host-country) dominated POs. On balance, therefore, **assignments were less beneficial at helping volunteers "develop lasting relationships and professional networks."**<sup>107</sup> Twenty-two participants<sup>108</sup> (41%) – or 54% of those with continuing careers<sup>109</sup> – established some valuable professional contacts that related directly to their field of expertise.<sup>110</sup> Of these, 32% (13) had accrued some tangible and direct professional benefit from the network by T3 – mainly through access to advice/expertise used in their work, commencing new projects, or professional opportunities. Six (15%) had received job offers through these networks. The other nine participants felt their relationships would be beneficial at some point but had yet to make use of these.
- In terms of accrued professional/career benefit, the most beneficial set of relationships were those with global/Australian professional agencies or organisations (e.g. contacts within INGOs, professional associations and other institutions in participants' professional fields). While these were generally fewer and weaker than other groups (**Figure 6**), of the 10 participants<sup>111</sup> reporting these connections, six<sup>112</sup> reported a tangible benefit while two had been offered international jobs.<sup>113</sup> T2 data show that these relations were developed at work (including representing POs at conferences or meetings) and outside work. Comparing participants' who established beneficial professional networks with those who did not, **those most likely to develop beneficial networks were volunteers who reported at T1 (i) strong career motivations, and (ii) knowledge of and experience in the host country, and those whose assignments were (iii) based in capitals or large cities, and (iv) with intergovernmental agencies or international NGOs (INGOs) rather than domestic NGOs or government agencies.**
- While contacts with other volunteers and HCNs were primarily social, some participants had benefitted professionally from these with offers of jobs, consultancy contracts, collaborating on work projects, or assistance to access work certifications or government documents.<sup>114</sup>

#### 2.3.1 Supporting Volunteers' Ongoing Career Progression and Professional Capabilities<sup>115</sup>



- The transferability of the (broadly favourable) career and professional outcomes are tempered by: (i) the breadth of occupational categories and volunteer roles across the sample,<sup>116</sup> which makes comparing professional development and career outcomes of a prototypical "volunteer assignment" challenging, (ii) the characteristics of this sample, which are broadly representative of other cohorts of international volunteers,<sup>117</sup> but which differ from the wider Australian working populace in important ways (e.g. education levels, gender distribution), and (iii) the atypical circumstances of participants' return due to COVID – i.e. sudden/unexpected for most and to changed and unpredictable circumstances for all.<sup>118</sup>

#### » Supporting volunteers' post-assignment career

- Depending on the program's priorities, the most critical finding in this section may relate to volunteers who entered the program with career-related objectives that they were unable to achieve. No relationship is apparent between (counterproductive) career outcomes and (i) most volunteer antecedents (e.g. ethnic identity, languages spoken, professional sector) and (ii) assignment features (expected duration, urban/rural location, accompanied by partners). While the study unveiled some evidence that the careers of women from rural backgrounds may have benefitted greatly, analysis of participants' home location in Australia (State, rurality) and career outcomes was equivocal and hampered partly by the large number of participants repatriating to different cities/States. Three of the six participants who entered the assignment with disabilities reported non-beneficial or negative career outcomes, a figure slightly less favourable than others despite all three having career-related objectives at T1.
- Despite the apparent benefits that some participants gained from achieving a shift to a prosocial career, the category of volunteers with the least favourable professional outcomes was *Transitioners*. They also reported relatively fewer benefits from their experiences and learning.<sup>119</sup> This group of volunteers viewed their assignment as a pathway to enter a new sector or context, most commonly with an international focus. At T2, all 11 *Transitioners* reported having affirmed or rejected a potential career avenue during the





assignment, suggesting the assignment may have been utilised to “test” a specific (and quite fixed) career trajectory, rather than “explore” possible career options, as some other groups had done. For this group, the opportunity cost of volunteering is high. Bringing to their attention the range of possible career consequences, including of rare but high impact events like COVID, seems warranted.

- As well as the challenges of readjusting during COVID, the repatriation may have led some volunteers to experience a “career shock” - “a disruptive and extraordinary event that is, at least to some degree, caused by factors outside (their) control and that triggers a deliberate thought process concerning one’s career.”<sup>120</sup> Those whose career plans were most strongly disrupted were volunteers who had been attached to the host country for long periods.<sup>121</sup> Thus, while deeper host-country expertise was associated with beneficial outcomes, volunteers’ embeddedness in the country may have destabilised their career trajectory, at least temporarily, following repatriation. It is also feasible that volunteers entering the program at a period of career change – forced or desired – dealt with two career shocks within one year. Future interviews with this cohort might identify impacts of this. Targeted support for these volunteers, especially in light of the large number of volunteers with career-related motivations, is likely to lead to more productive outcomes.
- The data do not allow us to canvass a full range of explanations for some negative career outcomes (which may necessitate employers’ perspectives). Nonetheless, international work assignments are recognised as intensely developmental yet not necessarily beneficial for careers. Reasons for this discrepancy include disconnection from home professional networks, inability to articulate or transfer new skills developed on the assignment into domestic settings, key achievements on assignment being out-of-sight and/or not verifiable to prospective employers, and difficulties readjusting. Accompanying partners face similar workforce re-entry issues.<sup>122</sup> At the same time, the data show that volunteers can begin applying some of their new capabilities reasonably soon after their assignment is completed, facilitated by the relative portability of the “soft skills” that volunteers develop.<sup>123</sup> No data is available yet that allows us to gauge how effectively they transferred these new skills (which would necessitate independent evaluation); however, the challenges of transferring these and “tacit knowledge” that often comes from cross-cultural collaborations<sup>124</sup> to new settings and contexts can be exacerbated for post-assignment work by moving to a different sector, context and/or cultural setting.<sup>125</sup> Guidance to help volunteers understand their professional development and to transfer this to new settings is likely to be viewed favourably, especially by those whose main objective/s for volunteering relates to career and/or professional enhancement.
- Most *Veterans* were not seeking regular paid employment after their assignment and so are excluded from some analysis reported in this section. Nonetheless, a subset of *Veterans* comprised those who had recently ended a professional career and for whom the assignment was a “reverse transition” from work to retirement. Two findings pertinent to this subset but not all volunteers are: (i) some in this group reported (mainly at T2) the enjoyment they took from experiencing the assignment and its distinctive characteristics (e.g. mentoring and supporting rather than managing or leading) as part of a decompression from work to retirement, and (ii) the potential benefit of the recency and relevance of their professional experiences relative to longer-term retirees. Benefit may come from the program recognising its value as a mechanism for (prospective) volunteers to facilitate a meaningful pathway of transition from work to retirement, and considering the implications of this for program recruitment, management, and volunteer support.

#### » Volunteers’ professional networks

- One area where participants may not have benefitted – relative to other professional experiences - relates to their “linking capital”<sup>126</sup> – relationships that connect participants across different power levels and which enable participants to access services, information and resources that might otherwise be unavailable. This may be especially acute in relation to domain-specific mentors and gatekeepers, as volunteers’ access to higher-status and more influential people from their profession was limited. Volunteers’ extended separation from their Australian networks makes this relevant to all volunteer assignment; the importance of this may have been magnified for this sample with their sudden return to Australia. Mechanisms to assist volunteers to remain connected with (international and Australian) professional networks and/or professional associations during their assignment in ways that may facilitate pathways to the next phase of their professional career is likely to be beneficial. This may involve, as a starting point, facilitating connections between volunteers and former volunteers from within the same professional area.

#### » Volunteering and formal education

- While we are unable to evaluate whether participants’ involvement in the program was more/less beneficial than other professional or life experiences for academic performance, the findings indicate that the distinctive features of the program’s assignments and structure – e.g. international settings and novel workplaces, strong volunteer and other in-country networks, support provided by VPLJ activities – do create conditions that are uniquely suited to consolidate, extend, inspire or guide formal education, and in doing so to contribute in important ways to the impact of both the program and the volunteers’ education. The findings suggest benefits in the program considering ways to support these processes by assisting volunteers to recognise and integrate pre-, during and post-assignment formal education with their experiences on the program.



## 2.4 Personal Circumstances and Capabilities

### » Personal changes

- The consistency and breadth of responses across time periods and volunteer types supports the conclusion that participation in the program can be the impetus for positive personal changes in volunteers and partners. All except nine participants attributed some form of valued personal development to their experiences on the program (45/54, 83%): eight reported no noticeable changes, one felt the personal impact was generally *negative*, while a small number of others reported negative as well as positive personal changes.<sup>127</sup> Participants were generally consistent in the types of personal changes they reported across T2 and T3, and these changes appear to have remained salient during this period. Distilling these, we identify a core set of six main personal changes: “confidence”, “satisfaction”, “resilience”, “cosmopolitanism”, “self-awareness” and “acceptance (easy going)”. These are summarised in the six sections of the large circle in **Figure 9** on the following page, which includes examples of the terminology used by participants to describe each of the six outcomes.
- The majority of members of four groups - *Veterans*, *Non-working Partners*, *Transitioners* and *Career Breakers* – identified personal outcomes as, overall, the biggest impact of their assignments. *Launchers*, several of whom were exposed to their first professional work role, reported improved “confidence” or independence more frequently than other groups.<sup>128</sup> While exceptions existed, changes described by *Veterans* tended to be “assimilative”,<sup>129</sup> that is, reaffirming or strengthening pre-existing traits or views, rather than more radical “accommodative” changes reported by younger participants.
- The conditions that participants reported as being conducive to personal changes – shown at the centre **Figure 9** and described in the box on the left<sup>130</sup> - do suggest that international development volunteering may offer unique spaces for personal development because of the relatively high levels of challenge, novelty, meaning and connection it presents.
- In addition to the outcomes in **Figure 9**, some evidence exists that their **assignment experiences appear to have provided a platform for participants to engage in different and potentially more transformational ways with global events and social movements**. Global social movements highlighting disparities of power, privilege, and justice like Black Lives Matter (BLM) and #MeToo intersected with some participants’ experiences in ways that led to ‘*deep questions*’ (#07) about power in international aid/development. Those most affected by these movements – all women who were motivated to springboard to international prosocial careers after their assignment (T1) - saw parallels between these movements’ criticisms of structural inequality and ‘*internalised colonialism and internationalised racism*’ among recipient communities (#46) and their ‘*place as a white person going into different cultures*’ (#07), or as a result of the changed way of thinking that they attribute to their learning on the assignment. This also came from observing practitioners of international development (‘*this attitude ... of superiority*’, #07). By T3, one (#04) had made tangible changes to their work and civic practices in direct response to this; one other had been exploring different career options during lockdown. Two others were yet to resolve this tension when interviewed at T3.

### » Lifestyle changes

- Twenty-nine participants (54%) reported enacting change/s to their lifestyle upon return that they linked to their assignment; four of these reported changes to multiple parts of their life. The right side of **Figure 10** summarises the six main lifestyle changes, ordered by the frequency that they were reported, and the number of participants reporting each.<sup>131</sup> Several of these changes were described as a desire to enact practices that aligned with new or strengthened values relating to family and community (importance of family), the environment (sustainable living, anti-consumption), the importance of work, and life priorities generally (e.g. health). In all cases, participants identified practices or attitudes that they enact in their lives now and which they attribute to experiences on their assignment. Other responses, excluded here, reported changed values or beliefs about political and social issues that were not (yet) evident in their lives.



Figure 9: Overview of main personal changes and conditions conducive to these

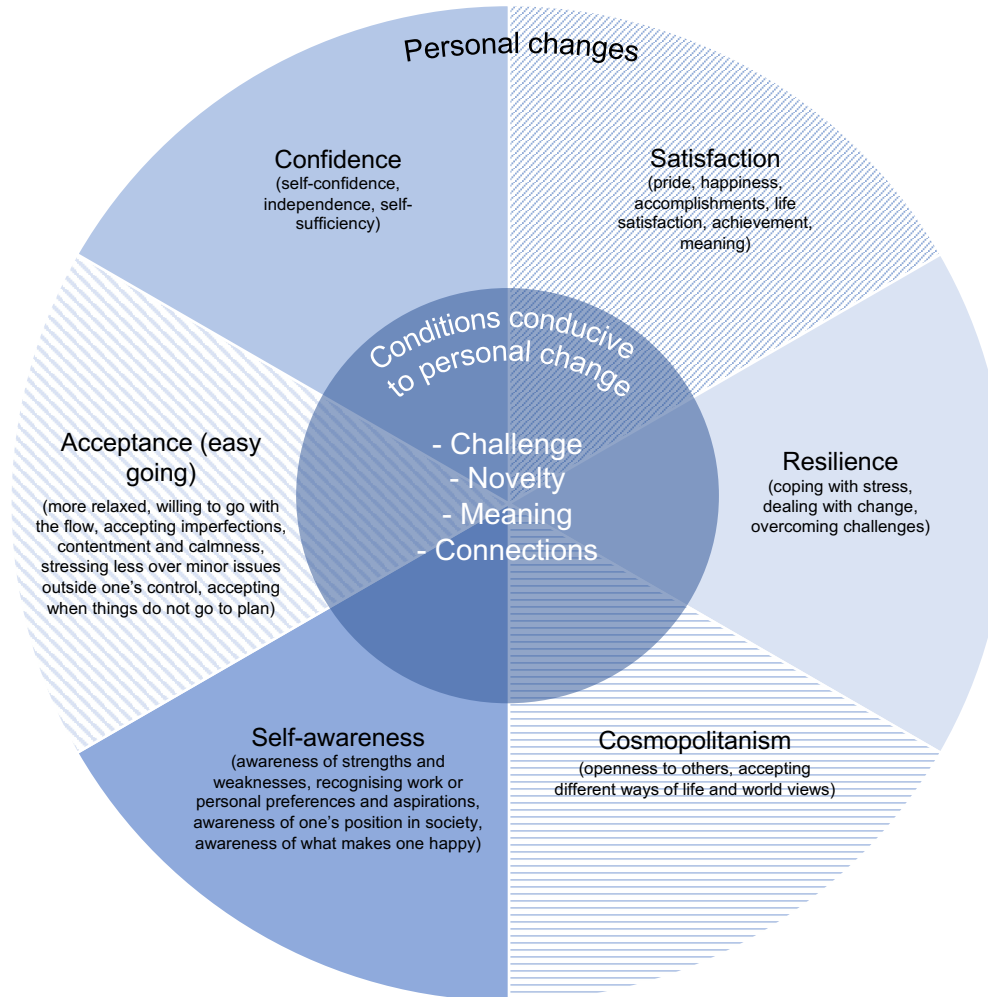
**Conditions conducive to personal change:**

**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



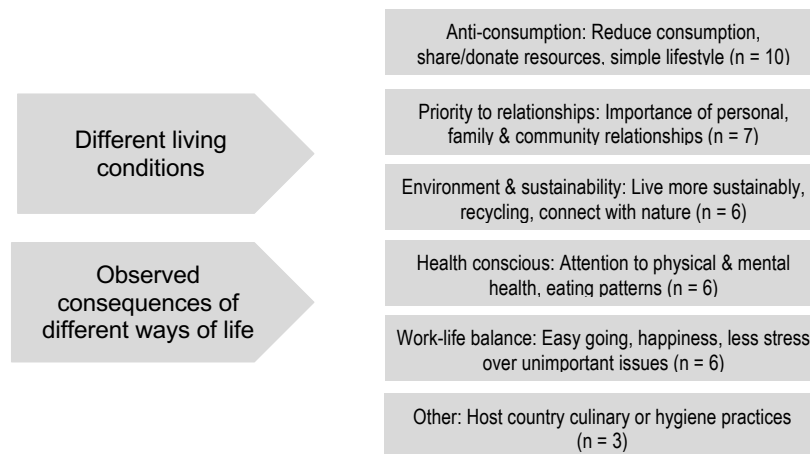
**Interpreting participants' personal changes**

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 existed 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.





**Figure 10: Nascent lifestyle changes and potential contributors to these changes**



- Experiences providing the impetus for these changes fall into two categories, shown at the left of **Figure 10**. Both relate in some way to the novelty of participants' in-country experiences and the contrasts with their past experiences or world view: (i) different living conditions, especially conditions of relative scarcity such as limited access during the assignment to healthy food or open spaces, separation from family and friends or living with fewer household possessions, and (ii) vicarious exposure to the consequences of different ways of life and work like a host community's more communitarian values or HCNs' perceived happiness without material resources, or observing the detrimental effects of poor waste disposal, or excessive alcohol consumption among expatriate communities. Lifestyle changes were reported across volunteer groups and life stages. More women than men reported lifestyle changes, although the strongest associations were with participants' "culture-general knowledge and capabilities": participants reporting lifestyle changes were more likely to develop their "global mindset" and "cognitive empathy."<sup>132</sup> These participants were also more likely to report challenging transitions after repatriation.<sup>133</sup> Five participants expressed disappointment that they had returned to 'old habits' when they returned home.<sup>134</sup>

#### » The challenges of adjusting following repatriation

- Difficult readjustments were reported by 24 participants, or 44% of the sample.<sup>135</sup> Sixteen (70%) of these had been repatriated under the program's COVID protocols. Among the terms used to describe the months after their return were '*brutal*' (#53), '*a rollercoaster*' (#42), '*a grief period*' (#23) and '*emotionally hard*' (#28), while participants described themselves during this time as '*homeless ... alienated*' (#12), '*not in a good headspace*' (#47), '*in mourning*' (#23) and '*in a bit of a hole*' (#48). The difficulties were further magnified for some participants by the conditions of their return. These included being unable to finish project/s or inform colleagues before their departure, leaving loved ones in the host country, returning to unfamiliar living and social settings, family bereavements or illnesses, extended isolation from family, friends or other support networks, restrictions on their movements, uncertainty about whether or when they would return to their assignments, lack of work structures and/or financial insecurity due to loss of regular income.<sup>136</sup>
- In the 12 months since their return, nine participants sought out professional health care for issues associated with their mental wellbeing that stemmed from the assignment, the challenges of COVID, and/or a combination of these.<sup>137</sup> Six others considered it, suggested they would have benefitted from it, yet were ambiguous about whether they had sought professional support.<sup>138</sup> Others dealt with chronic health injuries that had preceded or continued throughout their assignments. Some of those who found the assignment most (beneficially) transformational reported extended difficulties upon repatriation.<sup>139</sup>
- The assignment feature most strongly associated with participants reporting negative readjustment experiences was their level of knowledge of and engagement with the host country. In short, participants who were deeply embedded in their host country, on the whole, were more likely than others to report experiencing sustained difficulties when readjusting.<sup>140</sup> Other characteristics common in this group were a slightly higher instances of novice (rather than repeat) volunteers,<sup>141</sup> lower levels of perceived program support during the assignment (T2),<sup>142</sup> and greater likelihood of being from a rural area in Australia<sup>143</sup> and of volunteering alone (rather than accompanied).<sup>144</sup> Notably, this group also reported lower instances of civic participation, remote volunteering, and providing PO support at T3.<sup>145</sup>

#### » Personal relationships

- Many of the changed relationship patterns reported by participants are typical of those where extended separation has occurred (i.e. shedding some relationships and gaining others). Four participants had ongoing romantic relationships that had been instigated during the assignment and had sustained across



the study period. All had hopes to reunite with their partner and had taken tangible steps to realise this goal through professional activities, including job offers/applications or studies that would facilitate a return to the host country or support a partner relocating to Australia.

- Besides these new intimate relationships, **the most important change to participants' personal relationships came from the formation of strong bonds with other volunteers, mostly (although not exclusively) with those assigned to the same host country (Figure 6)**. The role of VPLJ activities in seeding these relationships was critical.<sup>146</sup> Volunteer friendships tended to be diverse in terms of age groups and professional backgrounds (points noted most often by *Veterans*), as well as gender and location in Australia. Two characteristics defined the adhesive that made these new friendships so strong: (i) a set of shared experiences (in-country and during repatriations) that were novel, stressful and/or memorable, and which participants felt that other friends or family did not fully grasp, and (ii) participants' sense of shared values and 'worldview' with volunteers.
- Connections with other volunteers were also more commonly associated with personal benefits than other relationships. The most prominent of these was emotional support to assist coping with repatriations and re-establishing their lives in Australia. For some participants these networks contributed directly to valuable outcomes such as emotional succour and practical support after their assignment, access to information about host countries and development/civic issues, and guidance and reinforcement on career or personal decisions. Through these mechanisms, these networks offer potential to be especially potent contributors to multiple program outcomes, including volunteers' personal and professional development, and ongoing contributions to POs' capacities.
- Some participants also reported giving '*higher priority*' (#20) to relationships with family as a result of their assignment,<sup>147</sup> mostly influenced by exposure to: (i) the inspiration from experiencing more collectivist cultures that tended to prioritise family relationships, (ii) extended separation from family, and/or (iii) the isolation of their assignment. Several reported more frequently instigating communication with family since returning because of this appreciation; four had reconfigured their living arrangements since returning to Australia specifically to be closer to extended family.<sup>148</sup> A few participants who were accompanied on assignment by a partner felt the shared experience in-country strengthened the relationship; for one, this was the major impact of the assignment. Participants who hosted family or friends during the assignment identified the experiences in the host country as an ongoing shared topic of interest and discussion.<sup>149</sup>

#### 2.4.1 Supporting Volunteers' Personal Circumstances and Capabilities



##### » Supporting constructive personal changes and outcomes

- The features that contributed to participants' personal changes are generally consistent with theories of informal learning<sup>150</sup> and share some similarities with research on "learning-intensive" settings (obstacles to be overcome, variety, change, non-routine activities, and "stretch" roles that extend prior responsibility or skill levels).<sup>151</sup> In other words, volunteers' descriptions of the activities that fostered personal development suggest that their workplaces and living conditions were, in fact, learning-intensive environments. Reconciling novel experiences, in particular, appears to be a key contributor to personal and lifestyle changes.
- Two cautions are warranted. First, some conditions that are known to be conducive to learning in workplaces - including access to extensive professional contacts and good quality superior feedback, were deficient at T2 and T3.<sup>152</sup> Second, a potential trade-off exists between volunteers' personal development and achieving their capacity development objectives. Consistent with **Figure 9**, assignments that present periods of challenge, isolation, difficulty, and deep immersion were among the most developmental experiences. Yet these features may also have contributed to some of the least development and most detrimental outcomes for volunteers and POs. This may be the case for volunteers whose assignments necessitate extreme "pivots" to adapt to the changing context and needs of the PO, which can be a source of extreme learning<sup>153</sup> but also challenge.<sup>154</sup>
- Supporting POs and volunteers to find an optimal balance of conditions is likely critical to maximising the potential gains (including personal development of volunteers) and mitigating losses (including not achieving assignment objectives). Challenge and novelty are complex and fluid, changing across the course of the volunteer assignment.<sup>155</sup> On this, it seems feasible that two of the enabling conditions at **Figure 9** - "meaning" and "connection" - may offset deficiencies in other areas. That is, efforts to provide meaningful volunteer assignments and support fulfilling relationships may offer volunteers motivation, information and emotional support that make their assignment especially enriching.<sup>156</sup>

##### » Supporting volunteers to sustain lifestyle changes

- The extent to which lifestyle changes are retained, and whether the program makes such retention more likely, is pertinent but not answered by the data available. The potential for volunteer assignments to instigate transformational changes in values and ways-of-life,<sup>157</sup> and for these to be continued well beyond the assignment,<sup>158</sup> have been documented; these are not inconsistent with the experiences reported by



volunteers in this study to date. In these reports, we see evidence of some volunteers modifying behaviours to create “consistent and coherent bundles of social practices” more aligned with their evolving beliefs.<sup>159</sup> Thus, for some at least, the lifestyle changes appear to be founded on strong values conducive to longer-lasting changes.

- Attitudes relating to social and environmental issues are more likely to be acted upon when individuals perceive personal agency and believe their actions can make a difference.<sup>160</sup> On this front, it is feasible that by offering volunteers the opportunity to experience “development in practice” - especially on assignments where the tangible outcomes of volunteers’ actions were evident to them - the program enables some of the awareness, agency and action that can contribute to the longevity of some lifestyle changes (e.g. sustainable living, reducing consumption).<sup>161</sup> The nature of some changes, such as work-life balance and stronger priority to family life, were not prominent outcome reported at T2 (immediately after their assignment) and so may be examples of more slowly emerging changes arising from the program, and so highlight the continual and evolving ways that volunteers, over months/years, make sense of and reap the personal fruits of their assignments.<sup>162</sup> Regardless, volunteers may benefit from help to understand changes in lifestyle via, for instance, discussion in VPLJ activities and/or social media, and/or through facilitating volunteers’ social networks that might nurture, reinforce and/or guide such changes as they emerge and evolve during and after assignments.

#### » Supporting better repatriations and post-assignment experiences

- The professional and personal costs of international repatriation on expatriates and their partners are well documented in academic literature. These include psychological and behavioural readjustment, integrating socially and professionally with home networks, and reacquainting oneself with work and day-to-day living.<sup>163</sup> The psychological consequences of liminality have been studied in various contexts, including the in-country experiences of international assignees<sup>164</sup> and international development practitioners.<sup>165</sup> Some common demographic (e.g. gender, age, marital status) and assignment features (e.g. cultural distance, deep immersion in host culture, contact with HCNs) may complicate volunteers’ repatriation under normal circumstances<sup>166</sup> and may have been exacerbated by the forced COVID repatriations, which has been linked to higher “risk for worsened mental health,”<sup>167</sup> and the loss of structures, routines and access to support created by COVID.<sup>168</sup> Nonetheless, the data suggest certain groups of volunteers’ may be susceptible to “protracted liminality” at this pivotal time in the volunteer lifecycle. It is suggested that the program acknowledge individual volunteers’ differences and unique needs, remain sensitive to the varied readjustment patterns of volunteers, and make information and support available, especially for participants who may be vulnerable to the negative consequences or in circumstances of distress (e.g. early return from assignment). This is likely to be most effective when support exhibits a genuine and proactive interest in the volunteers’ wellbeing.<sup>169</sup>

#### » Supporting productive personal (and professional) networks with other volunteers

- Findings across all four outcome areas indicate that new social networks with other volunteers which are forged around shared values and experiences are likely both an outcome and propellant of many of the changes identified in this study. In short, these social networks with other volunteers – which offer participants social, professional, civic and emotional utility - seem to be important mechanisms guiding and sustaining many of the beneficial personal and professional changes unearthed in this study. The program’s support to help volunteers establish, nurture, contribute to and benefit from these relationships before, during and after their volunteer assignment is a central feature of the suggestions outlined in Section 3.




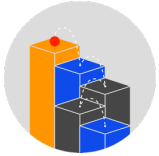

# 3. Key Findings and Implications

## 3.1 Overview of Main Findings

- Collectively, most (although not all) participants have benefitted personally or professionally from their involvement in the program. Most returned better informed, more culturally aware, and with new and productive relationships. Some have already achieved career benefits; others' career aspirations are yet to be fulfilled. In a few cases, these have been harmed. Despite this, many participants have begun drawing on and seeding the benefits of their experiences on the program already through the application of newly-formed knowledge, capabilities and relationships in their work, studies, volunteering and social lives. In many ways, the most vibrant manifestation of volunteers' assignment continues through their ongoing social networks, especially with fellow volunteers. These networks may provide the momentum that, in the long-term, exerts sustained influences on volunteers, and so has the strongest impact on their civic, international, professional and personal outcomes in coming years.
- The main outcomes for each of the seven types of volunteers are summarised in [Table 3](#). It shows that, despite forced repatriations, COVID lockdowns and some challenging in-country experiences, participants across most groups have achieved, or are on the way to achieving, many of the personal or professional benefits that led them to the program in 2019. These include drawing satisfaction from making a meaningful contribution (*Veterans*), experiencing a meaningful career recess (*Career Break*), taking steps towards starting a meaningful career (*Launchers*), and establishing a new foothold after a negative career disruption (*Imposed Transitioners*). *Enhancers* have had difficulties translating their professional development into improved professional status. Meanwhile, *Transitioners* have been the least likely to achieve their primary objective for entering the program to date, with COVID a major impediment to their desire to switch to new (often international) careers or sectors.
- Of participants' demographic features, gender was the strongest predictor of personal and professional change, with female participants, on average, reporting more positive personal and professional outcomes than male participants, even when factoring in the higher proportion of male participants who were retired (9/18 men compared with 7/35 women). Women were over-represented in groups experiencing larger professional benefit, impacts on their civic participation and lifestyle changes than men, but also more frequently reported difficult repatriations and lower levels of perceived program support during the assignment. Some evidence exists that the program may be especially beneficial for women from rural areas of Australia, although the small number of participants in this group (7) and the numerous participants relocating between rural-urban areas across the study period (i.e. pre-post) limits the extent to which this finding might be transferable.
- Different patterns of outcomes were also evident between participants who were accompanied on their assignment by a partner and those who were not – for instance, accompanied participants were less likely to develop valuable international or professional networks and less likely to have a challenging repatriation (T3) - and between volunteers assigned to rural and urban POs, with volunteers in rural POs reporting stronger knowledge of, contacts in, and engagement with the host country (T3) than volunteers in urban POs.



**Table 3: Features of main changes and learning outcomes by volunteer type**

Group name	Key features of changes and learning outcomes
<p><b>1. Launchers</b></p> 	<p><b>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).</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Launchers</i> had the strongest and clearest career ambitions at T1 and had accrued the most career benefit by T3.</li> <li>• <i>Launchers</i> were the group most likely to seek (T1) and to achieve (T3) a prosocial career transition. They reported developing domain-specific expertise more often than other groups. Some of this came from the hands-on field work that enabled them to experience their prior studies “in practice.” The assignment experiences also contributed to their international development literacy, especially understanding the “development landscape” and evaluating their interests and skillset within the sector. They reported professional legitimacy benefits more often than other groups. Perhaps because of these factors, they were also most likely to garner self-confidence. <b>In short, while the strong international career that so many <i>Launchers</i> wanted is yet to be realised, most took tangible steps toward achieving this.</b></li> <li>• This group was more likely than most to express ongoing interest in remote and/or in-country volunteer assignments. They were especially keen to align future volunteering opportunities with their career/professional interests.</li> </ul>
<p><b>2. Enhancers</b></p> 	<p><b>Enhancers see their volunteer assignment as a means to consciously develop or enhance a career through the acquisition of skills or experiences (progressing a career through a meaningful and developmental experience).</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In terms of capabilities, this group arguably reported the greatest improvement in valuable professional know-how. This includes domain-specific knowledge and capabilities, role performance and management capabilities, and culture-general knowledge or “global mindset.” The bulk of this group identified professional and career outcomes as the assignment’s major impacts. In short, most were able to enhance their goal to professional capabilities and experiences.</li> <li>• At the same time, a relatively large proportion of <i>Enhancers</i> who sought a prosocial career transition at T1 were unable to achieve this by T3. They were also more likely than most groups to experience a challenging repatriation. Both outcomes were strongly influenced by COVID. <b>Taking these outcomes holistically, while their assignments were professionally developmental, <i>Enhancers</i> have not yet translated this to substantial improvement in their professional status.</b></li> <li>• This group was more likely than most groups to express ongoing interest in in-country volunteer assignments.</li> </ul>
<p><b>3. Transitioners</b></p> 	<p><b>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 they used the assignment to “test” a specific (and quite fixed) career trajectory, rather than “explore” possible career options.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In many ways, this was the group that, professionally, had the most at stake on their assignment. Most had chosen to leave paid employment to use volunteering as a platform to test a professional transition to a new field or context and so the potential (negative) consequences of an uncommon but high impact disruption like COVID was relatively high.</li> <li>• This proved to be the case, with <i>Transitioners</i> experiencing the worst career consequences of COVID. They were the least likely to achieve positive personal or professional outcomes. They were the most likely to desire a prosocial career transition at T1 but among the least likely to achieve this. Despite the relatively strong career focus, just 3/11 reported career-related influences as the major impact of the assignment. In short, <b>most <i>Transitioners</i>’ desire to transition to a new career or profession is yet to be fulfilled.</b></li> <li>• The group did frequently report enhanced cultural and domain-specific knowledge and capabilities, suggesting developmental elements to their assignments with the potential to assist future career transitions, especially for those with international career aspirations. Nonetheless, at T3 they overwhelmingly saw the major impact of their assignment as personal, rather than professional, revolving around relationships, self-awareness, and a sense of meaning/satisfaction.</li> <li>• <i>Transitioners</i> were the most likely to experience a challenging repatriation and were less likely than most groups to express an ongoing interest in future international volunteer assignments.</li> </ul>



## 4. Career Breakers



**For Career Breakers, a volunteer assignment is an interlude to a career that may be returned to after the assignment is completed (taking a temporary and meaningful hiatus from a career).**

- *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.
- **While the break in their career was not always as meaningful as they would have liked, most Career Breakers were positively changed by their experiences on the program, and this has begun filtering into their personal and professional lives.** The main professional benefits came from the legitimacy and reputation that others attached to their assignment, rather than the technical knowledge and capabilities that they developed. Most found the insight to a new context beneficial yet not transformational, although for two it was *'formative'* and the source of career inflections that are still unfolding. Like *Transitioners*, the most frequently reported major impacts amongst this group were personal, with improved confidence, personal growth and self-awareness all reported.
- *Career Breakers'* interests in civic participation appear to have shifted away from the program. They increased their overall pre/post voluntary service more than other groups yet were less likely than most to express ongoing interest in remote and/or in-country volunteer assignments.

## 5. 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).**

- The career impacts on *Imposed Transitioners* were generally positive, despite less favourable starting points. This group was more likely than most to enhance domain-specific knowledge and capabilities at T2 and T3; 4/7 reported improved career confidence among the assignment's major impacts. Several *Imposed Transitioners* were seeking a prosocial career transition at T1 and most had achieved this by T3.
- *Imposed Transitioners* also experiences positive cultural impacts. They were most likely to report developing culture-general capabilities ("global mindset"). Improved cultural insights (either culture-specific or culture-general) were also prominent in their assessment of the assignment's major impact.
- At the same time, this group was more likely than most to report a challenging repatriation and were less likely to express an ongoing interest in future volunteer assignments (T2 and T3). This may be linked to their desire, expressed at T2 and T3, to be directing their energies towards a new (paid) professional area.

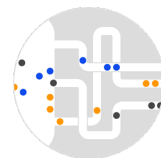
## 6. Veterans



**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).**

- *Veterans* was the group most likely to report relatively minor changes from the assignment, and frequently moderated their reports of changes as *'not major'*. Most of their learning centred on cultural capabilities (T2 and T3). This was primarily country-specific knowledge and capabilities. Indeed, *Veterans* was the group with the largest discrepancy between reports of enhancing culture-specific as opposed to culture-general knowledge and capabilities.
- **For Veterans, the assignment's major impacts tended to focus on personal outcomes like improved sense of meaning/satisfaction and personal relationships. The data suggest that Veterans, on the whole, have been able to meet their pre-assignment objective/s despite not all having overwhelmingly positive experiences.** They valued the diversity of the new networks that they developed through the assignment, primarily with other volunteers (T3).
- Most *Veterans* expressed ongoing interest in remote and/or in-country volunteering (T3), although preferences were expressed for short-term in-country assignments.

## 7. Non-working Partners



**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 tended to be least strongly affected by their assignment to date. The two who reported the strongest impact had much higher levels of contact with HCNs than others in this group. Like *Veterans*, **the largest perceived impacts of the assignment overall tended to be personal and stemmed from the immersion in a vastly different culture, and the difficulties and joys of navigating this experience (e.g. improved resilience, happiness/satisfaction, and problem-solving capabilities).** Consistent with this, cultural capabilities were the most commonly reported learning outcomes.
- While most *Non-working Partners* entered the assignment with aspirations to learn new skills, including the host-country language, on the whole these went unfulfilled. However, most emerged with improved international development literacy, better awareness of and engagement with the host country, and a strong affection for the host country and the experience. Several have explored domestic volunteering options since their repatriation, although for most the direction of this appears not yet strongly influenced by their experiences on the program.





## 3.2 Key Implications and Tentative Recommendations

- Weighing up the results in Section 2 and without detracting from the program's aim to support locally-led change, we see opportunities for the program to align volunteer support and program management activities across the full volunteer lifecycle to further volunteers' personal and professional development. Specifically, we propose four cross-cutting areas as most likely to provide the clearest guidance to continue supporting volunteers to develop and learn personally and professionally. Each is discussed below.

### 3.2.1 Helping Volunteers to Benefit from Diverse Connections

- A common theme across T1-T3 has been the value participants have attached to and derived from new informal networks. To date, the strongest and most valuable networks are those with other volunteers. These have informed, at different stages, participants' assignment preparation,<sup>170</sup> in-country experiences,<sup>171</sup> and subsequent civic, professional and personal lives. It is also clear that these offer the potential for community benefit through coordinated responses and advocacy. It seems feasible that the common experiences and shared values around which these networks form contribute them being relatively valuable and robust, even when weaker ties are forgone. In short, **the program provides – and should continue to support its role as - a platform for participants to develop strong values-based relationships with other volunteers.** While controlling these networks may be counterproductive, we see value in the program taking steps to enable, facilitate and support the formation and continuance of these communities, and so potentially benefit volunteers and the program.
- Importantly, these opportunities should be availed to all volunteers, including from a range of backgrounds (e.g. minority groups) and assigned to a variety of contexts (e.g. remote locations). Moreover, these networks with fellow volunteers should not crowd out opportunities for volunteers to establish other relationships, especially with HCNs. On the latter, the results of T2 and T3 show that close and regular contact with HCNs and a sound understanding of the local culture are important foundations for many of the valued personal and professional gains available to volunteers.<sup>172</sup> We thus see value in the program making efforts to help volunteers balance and/or integrate their various networks (professional and social), to understand the benefits of retaining multifarious strong connections (home-country, host-country, other), and to understand how the volunteers themselves and the program can support this. In short, **at all stages of the volunteer lifecycle, the program should encourage and help volunteers be legitimate participants in diverse networks that are complementary and supportive of their goals and their emotional and informational needs.**<sup>173</sup> While rarely a stated motivation for volunteering (T1), it may be the one of the most valuable mechanisms that support volunteers' personal and professional development.
- The program may initially focus on opportunities for high-quality contact amongst volunteers, especially in isolated locations.<sup>174</sup> On balance, support is suggested to ensure volunteers from minority backgrounds feel included and valued members of volunteers' social groups.<sup>175</sup>
- Building intercultural relationships – which can be effortful, time-consuming, and require certain conditions to be present<sup>176</sup> - may necessitate capabilities that volunteers, at least initially, lack, and so may require additional support from the program. Similarly, curating opportunities for *professional* networks may be rendered more complex by, for instance, the array of volunteers' professional backgrounds (and interests) or assignment isolation. Nonetheless, the findings do suggest domain-specific network-building and learning are areas that may disadvantage volunteers - relative to those who are not involved in the program (i.e. pursuing a "standard" domestic career) – when seeking to re-enter the labour market in some sectors.

**Recommendation 1:** That the program make available opportunities for volunteers to form, sustain and contribute to social networks that offer members support, friendship, information and opportunities to develop and apply newfound capabilities. These include networks comprising other volunteers, host-country nationals, others from their professional field, and other groups who are touchstones on volunteers' journey through the program.

### 3.2.2 Matching Volunteers to Assignments with “Learning-intensive Characteristics”

- The findings show that volunteer assignments provide “learning-intensive” conditions conducive to change. These stem from many generic features of volunteers' roles, the PO environments in which they work, and the experiences available in challenging and unfamiliar socio-cultural settings. **The features elucidated in Sections 2.1-2.4 provide the most comprehensive map of the generic characteristics that make volunteer assignments developmental. On the whole, matching volunteers to assignments that offer the right mix of these characteristics is expected to provide abundant opportunities to gain personally and professionally.**
- Importantly, though, while these conditions can be learning intensive for volunteers, this must be balanced against the program's overarching objective to support locally-led change in POs. Assignments which are developmental for volunteer can elicit increased motivation, commitment, confidence and meaning; all of which can improve performance.<sup>177</sup> However, this should not be assumed for all individuals and all POs and is complicated by the fluid/evolving nature of assignments. Second, a further theme common in





responses across all four outcome areas and both T2 and T3 is the vast diversity of volunteer starting points, in-country experiences and (desired and accrued) personal and professional outcomes. Thus, enabling “stretch roles” or HCN interactions with the right degree of challenge or novelty, for instance, will vary between individuals and in different POs and settings.

- Consequently, while broad principles can help support volunteers’ learning and growth, attention to particular conditions and informational and emotional support for different volunteers is likely advantageous – indeed, necessary – for them to benefit personally and professionally. **Table 3** and Section 2 detail how pre-assignment motivations (e.g. career transition), certain personal characteristics (e.g. prior experiences), professions (e.g. Health), positions (e.g. “mentoring” role), or circumstances (e.g. accompanied) as well as context features (e.g. PO type, assignment locations) all influence whether and how assignments can be developmental. **In short, the LSAV’s findings highlight how the combination of personal and contextual features contribute in different ways to volunteers’ learning palette.**
- As the diversity of volunteers in the program increases, the range of motivations, experiences and outcomes can be expected to grow. We therefore see value in the program being active in recognising these diverse individuals, experiences and outcomes, and aiming to work closely with stakeholders (including POs) to offer assignments, program structures, and support mechanisms that provide the best possible learning experiences (formal and informal) for the variety of people, assignments and goals. The findings of the LSAV to date go some way to assisting the program to do this.

**Recommendation 2:** That the program make available volunteer assignments with “learning-intensive characteristics” in terms of the role, PO environment, placement setting and experiences. Importantly and where feasible, doing this should consider individual volunteers’ objectives, needs, circumstances or past experiences that may influence their potential to gain personally or professionally during and/or after their volunteer assignments.

### 3.2.3 Helping Volunteers Take Advantage of Informal and Incidental Learning Opportunities

- All three LSAV reports to date have highlighted the strong contribution that VPLJ activities make to volunteers’ formal learning (i.e. intentional learning that occurs in structured environments like PDBs and ICOPs). Findings across all four outcome areas and multiple waves of data (T2-T3) also emphasise the richness of the many informal and incidental learning opportunities that volunteers encounter (i.e. learning as a by-product of performing other activities).<sup>178</sup> The LSAV brings to the fore the types of informal learning that volunteers accumulate (what is learned), the contexts or situations distinctive to the program that make this possible (what contributes to this learning) and subsequently how this new knowledge, capabilities and experience is applied (how these changes benefit volunteers and others).
- **Building on this, we see value in the program articulating as one overarching aim of the program’s support for volunteers (including VPLJ and associated activities) to help volunteers to benefit from the many informal and incidental learning and developmental opportunities that are presented.** This includes helping volunteers to understand, integrate and transfer their formal and informal learning for their own and others’ benefits before, during and after their assignment, and facilitating these activities in ways that enable opportunities build valuable networks. This might include, for instance, activities designed to assist volunteers to integrate formal (via VPLJ) and informal (unstructured) learning, transfer learning to new situations (including post-assignment work, civic participation and life), and articulate their personal and professional development in meaningful ways (including to prospective employers). Supplementing these with opportunities to connect to organisations or individuals that offer the chance for volunteers to further develop and/or apply their new knowledge and capabilities is also likely to strengthen the personal and professional gains that volunteers accrue, as well as augment the program’s overall impact.

**Recommendation 3:** That the program make available structured support and opportunities, primarily under the auspices of the VPLJ, to help volunteers understand and take advantage of the many informal and incidental learning opportunities that international volunteer assignments present.

### 3.2.4 Undertaking In-house Information Gathering or Research

- Finally, the findings point to areas in which program staff may benefit from additional information gathering and/or research. Two areas to emerge are: (i) to better understand how social media is used to connect volunteers to POs, and therefore how the program might best support these ongoing exchanges, and (ii) to understand the distinctive features of different assignment modalities in attracting volunteers and supporting their learning. For these, insights from future iterations of the LSAV are expected to be beneficial, but each would benefit from access to informants outside the LSAV sample.

**Recommendation 4:** That the program make available information for program staff to assist them to support volunteers to benefit personally and professionally. This includes efforts to understand the distinctive features of different assignment modalities, the roles of social media in connecting volunteers to POs and other networks, and ways to customise support to certain types of volunteers to enhance their propensity to benefit personally and professionally from the program.



## 4. Endnotes

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- <sup>1</sup> 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).
- <sup>2</sup> No explanation was offered for the withdrawal of participant #13. The analysis in this report is from the final sample of 54 participants unless otherwise stated.
- <sup>3</sup> Section 3.2.3, Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers: Phase One Final Report (October 2019).
- <sup>4</sup> A copy of the online survey is included as Attachment 7 in the Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers: Inception Report (April 2019)
- <sup>5</sup> Position descriptions are for the 49 volunteers only; they exclude AADs who did not perform designated volunteer roles.
- <sup>6</sup> Interviews were conducted one-to-one by one of the three Australian-based research team members (Devereux, Everingham, Fee) at a time and via a medium that suited participants.
- <sup>7</sup> The research team held several meetings prior to and during the data collection periods to ensure interview schedules were appropriate and questions clear and relevant. Minor refinements were made to improve the structure and clarity of questions as interviews progressed. Moreover, several changes were made to interview topics at T2 for participants who underwent forced repatriation following the escalation of COVID. Details can be found in Section 2.3, Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers: Phase Two Final Report (December 2020).
- <sup>8</sup> Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers: Phase One Final Report (October 2019), Section 4.1.3.
- <sup>9</sup> As detailed at T2, a large number of participants reported that their involvement with the program changed their view about international aid or development as a sector. "Sector-specific knowledge and skills" accounted for 9% of learning outcomes (45/522), primarily among *Transitioners*, *Veterans* and *Enhancers*. For nine participants, the experience confirmed pre-existing favourable views about Australia's commitment to aid and development in the region (participants #10, #11, #15, #17, #18, #33, #44, #50 and #51). For a smaller number of others (participants #06, #14, #41 and #50) it reinforced sceptical views about the value of foreign aid, with participants observing situations that they felt reflected bureaucracy ('box-ticking', #14), and myopic (#20) or ineffectual impacts (#41 and #47). Source: Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers: Phase Two Final Report (December 2020), Section 4.3 and EndNote 92.
- <sup>10</sup> Participants #02, #03, #04, #17, #23, #32, #40, #43 and #44.
- <sup>11</sup> Participants #07, #08, #11, #16, #20, #26, #27, #30, #31, #34, #38, #39, #45, #48, #49, #53, #54 and #55.
- <sup>12</sup> These reports estimate a combined loss of over 12 million volunteer hours across Australia per week since the commencement of COVID. Sources: Volunteering Australia (2020). Reengaging volunteers and COVID-19. Available online: <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/2021.02.08-Re-engaging-Volunteers-and-COVID-19-Report.pdf> Also see: 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. Available online: [https://csrcm.cass.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/docs/2020/6/The\\_experience\\_of\\_volunteers\\_during\\_the\\_early\\_stages\\_of\\_the\\_COVID-19\\_pandemic\\_0.pdf](https://csrcm.cass.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/docs/2020/6/The_experience_of_volunteers_during_the_early_stages_of_the_COVID-19_pandemic_0.pdf)
- <sup>13</sup> Prior studies of UK and Canadian volunteers show increased civic engagement post-assignment, especially among younger volunteers: Clark, J. & Lewis, S (2016). *Impact Beyond Volunteering: A Realist Evaluation of the Complex and Long-term Pathways of Volunteer Impact*, VSO; 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.
- <sup>14</sup> Evidence that participation in the program led to different patterns of voluntary service was evident in 29 participants (54%). In several cases participants were explicit about the role that their assignment played as an impetus for this change; in other cases, participants were more ambivalent about attributing causality.
- <sup>15</sup> Examples of participants who recognised and acknowledged a shift towards more internationally-oriented volunteering include: #01, #02, #03, #06, #12, #18, #21, #23, #27, #28, #31, #35, #40, #44, #53.
- <sup>16</sup> Participants who reported being aware of using their professional skills in voluntary activities at T3 were: #04, #12, #15, #21, #22, #25, #26, #27, #28, #40, #44, #37, #46, #47 and #49.
- <sup>17</sup> Participants #21, #25, #27, #28, #44 and #47.
- <sup>18</sup> Participants #04, #21 and #28.
- <sup>19</sup> Participants #02, #08, #09, #12, #21, #30, #43, #46 and #49.
- <sup>20</sup> Examples of participants whose volunteering was consciously more communitarian were #12, #43 and #46.
- <sup>21</sup> Participant #30.
- <sup>22</sup> Examples of participants' unstructured volunteering activities included: language teaching to friends (#09), helping neighbours and/or friends cope during COVID (#36, #44), concerted efforts to build relationships with neighbours (#15, #16), and sharing goods (#12, #21, #43).
- <sup>23</sup> Excludes AADs unless stated.
- <sup>24</sup> Repatriated volunteers: Of the 33 volunteers who were repatriated (excluding *Non-working partners* and one participant who withdrew from the study prior to T3): (i) At T2, 24 (73%) were continuing to provide some residual support and 27 (82%) had some form of ongoing contact with POs; (ii) at T3 the number of volunteers who maintained ongoing contact with PO colleagues rose to 30 (91%). Ten of these (30%) were continuing to provide some ongoing support; seven (21%) via formal ongoing remote volunteer assignments and three informally with the PO. Repatriated participants continuing to support POs at T3 via a formal remote assignment were #03, #09, #10, #17, #19, #23 and #24. Those continuing to provide support informally at T3 were #25, #33 and #49. Not repatriated volunteers: Of the 16 volunteers who were not repatriated: (i) At T2, four (25%) were continuing to provide some residual support and 13 (81%) had some form of ongoing contact with POs; (ii) At T3, the number of volunteers who maintained ongoing contact with PO colleagues remained constant (81%), but just two



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volunteers (12%) were continuing to provide some ongoing support, although the support was substantial for just one of these, a relationship formalised via a remote volunteering assignment. Of the volunteers who were not repatriated before their assignment was completed, participant #10 was completing a remote assignment and participant #44 was providing informal support for the PO at T3.

<sup>25</sup> Examples of participants who provided post-assignment support for POs are: (i) supporting POs until they were able to finish a project or specific activity/task that they had started before being repatriated: participants #07, #45 and #49, (ii) providing advice or feedback in response to ad-hoc questions: participants #01, #24, #25 and #44, (iii) participating in mentor-style discussions: participants #03, #08 and #23, (iv) reviewing grant applications: participants #22 and #49, (v) preparing COVID emergency documents: participant #27, (vi) helping develop relationships with Australian organisations: participant #26, (vii) teaching English: participants #33, and (viii) writing résumés: participant #55.

<sup>26</sup> The intensity and duration of participants' ongoing support for POs varied greatly, and exact figures were unclear in some interviews. This estimate is based the descriptions provided by participants in interviews and assumes that: (i) volunteers who continued to support POs at T3 had done so for the full 12-month period (12 x 12 months), and (ii) the ten participants who had discontinued their support before T3 averaged 3 months of ongoing contribution (10 x 3 months). It should also be noted that the time devoted to supporting POs varied from ad-hoc support when needed to numerous hours daily.

<sup>27</sup> This rise in PO contact from T2 to T3 likely reflects adjustment challenge experienced by many participants in the months following their repatriation (T2) – see Section 3.4.2 – and their 'recovery' from this to more normal levels of contact by T3.

<sup>28</sup> Of the 12 participants providing ongoing support for POs, four were *Veterans* and three *Launchers*, as well as two *Enhancers* and one *Career Breaker, Imposed Transitioner* and *Transitioner*. Of the 14 participants who were accompanied by a partner during their assignment and who held volunteer assignments (excluding *Non-working Partners*), just 2 were supporting their PO at T3. for those unaccompanied, 10/35 were.

<sup>29</sup> Of the 12 participants providing ongoing support for POs, five completed assignments in rural/remote locations. This compares with 8/37 for those volunteers who did not continue providing support (excluding AADs). Of the 12 participants providing ongoing support for POs, six were with government agencies or domestic NGOs; this compares with 15/37 for those volunteers who did not continue providing support. It should be noted that two participants had started paid contractual work with former POs that were intergovernmental agencies.

<sup>30</sup> Participants #01, #03, #06, #09, #10, #17, #19, #22, #23, #24, #26, #27, #37, #40, #44, #46, #48, #51 and #53.

<sup>31</sup> Participants #04, #07, #15, #16, #30, #41 and #52.

<sup>32</sup> Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers: Phase Two Final Report (December 2020).

<sup>33</sup> Excludes AADs unless stated.

<sup>34</sup> Participants #02, #19, #37, #55.

<sup>35</sup> Excludes AADs unless stated.

<sup>36</sup> Clark, J. & Lewis, S. (2016). *Impact Beyond Volunteering: A Realist Evaluation of the Complex and Long-term Pathways of Volunteer Impact*, VSO; 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.

<sup>37</sup> Starr, J.M. (1994). Peace Corps service as a turning point. *The International Journal of Aging and Human Development*, 39(2), 137-161.

<sup>38</sup> Prior studies suggest a degree of longevity in civic participation among (mainly young) returned volunteers: 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.

<sup>39</sup> Some participants' shift to international volunteering, for instance, saw a decline in their contributions to domestic causes and organisations.

<sup>40</sup> Section 4.2.2, Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers: Phase Two Final Report (December 2020).

<sup>41</sup> Sections 4.2.2 and 5.2, Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers: Phase Two Final Report (December 2020).

<sup>42</sup> Participants reporting better intercultural communication skills: Participants #04, #19, #39 and #48.

<sup>43</sup> Participants reporting improved relationship building capabilities: Participants #04, #08, #23, #28 and #35.

<sup>44</sup> Section 4.2.1 and 4.2.2, Attachment 8.2, Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers: Phase Two Final Report (December 2020).

<sup>45</sup> Sections 4.2.2 and 4.2.3 and Attachments 7.1 to 7.3, Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers: Phase Two Final Report (December 2020).

<sup>46</sup> Participants' descriptions of this change are most analogous to "cognitive cultural intelligence" used by social psychologists - see, for instance, Ang, S. & Van Dyne, L. (2015). *Handbook of Cultural Intelligence: Theory, Measurement, and Applications*. Routledge; Yari, N., Lankut, E., Alon, I. & Richter, N. F. (2020). Cultural intelligence, global mindset, and cross-cultural competencies: A systematic review using bibliometric methods. *European Journal of International Management*, 14(2), 210-250. They also share some similarities with terms used by volunteer researchers in previous studies of development volunteers: for instance, what Starr labels as "attitude" changes (e.g. attitude to the home country) and what others term "cultural awareness" or "global citizenship." Sources: Baillie Smith, M. & Laurie, N. (2011). International volunteering and development: Global citizenship and neoliberal professionalisation today. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 36(4), 545-559; Clark, J. & Lewis, S. (2016). *Impact Beyond Volunteering: A Realist Evaluation of the Complex and Long-term Pathways of Volunteer Impact*, VSO; 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. (2017), *Nature, Trends and Impacts of Canadians Who Volunteer Abroad: A Study of the Literature*, Prepared for ESDC (unpublished).

<sup>47</sup> The term "global mindset" is widely used in academic literature. While definitions vary and have evolved in recent years, it is generally used to describe someone with "a highly complex cognitive structure . . . characterized by an openness to and articulation of multiple cultural and strategic realities on both global and local levels, and the cognitive ability to mediate and integrate across this multiplicity" (Levy et al. 2007, p. 244). Source: Levy, O., Beechler, S., Taylor, S. & Boyacigiller, N.A. (2007). What we talk about when we talk about 'global mindset': Managerial cognition in multinational corporations. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 38(2), 231-258.



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<sup>48</sup> This represents 31/39 participants for whom this outcome arose in interviews. Just 8/39 (21%) reported no change in their view of Australia or being 'Australian'.

<sup>49</sup> This is higher than earlier studies of development volunteers. For instance, Starr's (1994) longitudinal study of Peace Corps volunteers reports 25% developing better understanding and appreciation of the United States; Starr, J.M. (1994). Peace Corps service as a turning point. *The International Journal of Aging and Human Development*, 39(2), 137-161.

<sup>50</sup> Participants #01, #04, #05, #09, #10, #14, #26, #28, #35, #39 and #49. Participants were from five of the seven categories of participants. They were more likely than other participants to report proficiency and interest in the host-country language (5/11; in two cases this pre-dated their assignment).

<sup>51</sup> Participants #01, #04 and #10.

<sup>52</sup> Participants #09, #28, #35 and #39.

<sup>53</sup> Participants #09, #28, #35 and #39.

<sup>54</sup> Participants #04, #12, #15, #28 and #49.

<sup>55</sup> Seven of the 28 participants who reported global mindset changes drew parallels between parts of their assignment and how issues of disadvantage, inequity, capacity development or cross-cultural awareness related to (participants' understandings of) the experiences of Indigenous Australians. This compared with 3/26 of those who did not report changed global mindset.

<sup>56</sup> Greater empathy was reported by 17 participants: #01, #05, #06, #11, #12, #15, #18, #19, #20, #21, #24, #28, #29, #31, #33, #36, #46 and #49.

<sup>57</sup> Park, H., Lea Abbott, J. & Werner, S. (2014). A perspective-taking model for global assignments. *Journal of Global Mobility*, 2(3), 280-297.

<sup>58</sup> Privilege awareness was reported by 12 participants: #01, #04, #10, #12, #19, #21, #22, #29, #40, #43, #51 and #52. We derive the term "privilege awareness" from: Case, K.A. (2007). Raising white privilege awareness and reducing racial prejudice: Assessing diversity course effectiveness. *Teaching of Psychology*, 34(4), 231-235. Also see Stewart, T.L., Latu, I.M., Branscombe, N.R., Phillips, N.L. & Denney, T.H. (2012). White privilege awareness and efficacy to reduce racial inequality improve White Americans' attitudes toward African Americans. *Journal of Social Issues*, 68(1), 11-27.

<sup>59</sup> Examples of participants who offered explanations for not applying their cross-cultural capabilities since their return were: not finding employment (#45), restrictions on social contacts (#35), dealing with personal/family demands (#41), having to work remotely and so lacking direct interpersonal or cross-cultural exchanges (#35), and being over-burdened with work that prevented opportunities to experiment with new ways of working (#44).

<sup>60</sup> This comprises 20 of the 54 participants (38%): Participants #01, #02, #04, #09, #12, #19, #23, #24, #27, #28, #33, #40, #42, #45, #47, #48, #49, #52, #53 and #55.

<sup>61</sup> Participants #19, #27, #28, #46 and #54.

<sup>62</sup> Three conditions were most strongly correlated with higher levels of engagement with the host country at T3: (i) having a better understanding of the host culture before the assignment, as reflected through variables like prior experience living in the host country, speaking the host-country language, knowledge of the local culture, and having completed a previous international volunteer assignment (T1), (ii) wanting a future international career (at both T1 and T2), and (iii) undertaking the assignment alone (i.e. not accompanied by a partner). It is also true that volunteers who worked closely with designated HCN counterparts established stronger emotional bonds that appear to have made these relationships more sustainable (see Section 4.3.1) and, through these, involve higher levels of two-way information exchange relating to the host country. Other variables were positively correlated with engagement, although the basis for these relationships is less clear. For instance, those whose engagement was strongest were more likely to work in the Health sector, in government agencies or international NGOs, and be on assignment in East Asia. For some, this pattern may reflect the relative availability of information (including in English language).

<sup>63</sup> The size of nodes and connectors are not to scale. They are intended to be indicative of the relative number of participants reporting an ongoing relationship with a group (nodes) and the relative strength of these connections (connectors).

<sup>64</sup> The five participants who had no ongoing contact with the host country at T3 were: #05, #14, #36, #38, #50. This includes two AADs, and two who had unsuccessful assignments with their POs (i.e. departed the assignment prematurely).

<sup>65</sup> Participants #06, #07, #24, #35, #47 and #49.

<sup>66</sup> HCNs' lack of English language competence was most commonly reported as an *inhibitor* to ongoing contact; for example, participants

#01, #04, #26, #31 and #55.

<sup>67</sup> Examples include participants #18, #21, #32, #34 and #41.

<sup>68</sup> Australian Volunteers Program Global Program Strategy 2018-2022.

<sup>69</sup> Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, and Honiara, Solomon Islands, were particularly conducive to participants socialising with expatriates.

<sup>70</sup> The role of ICOPs in stimulating interest in the political, social and historical landscape of the host country is reported in Section 5.2.1 of Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers: Phase Two Final Report (December 2020).

<sup>71</sup> The 12 participants continuing to provide support to POs at T3 were slightly more likely to report continuing interest in using and learning the host-country language at T2 (7/12); however, this had declined by T3, where the numbers were similar to other participants who were not supporting POs.

<sup>72</sup> Sections 4.2.3 and 5.2.1, Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers: Phase Two Final Report (December 2020).

<sup>73</sup> Putnam, R.D. (2000). Bowling alone: America's declining social capital. In *Culture and Politics* (pp. 223-234). Palgrave Macmillan, New York.

<sup>74</sup> Participants working part-time at T3 were #04, #11, #27, #35 and #37. Participants working in roles not directly related to their preferred profession were #11, #12, #20, #21 and #27.

<sup>75</sup> No *Non-working partners* or *Veterans* experienced major career impacts. The potential career benefits for *Non-working partners* were constrained by them being unable to work during their time in country; *Veterans* were constrained by not having a professional career to resume upon their return to Australia (although some did pick up part-time work). Nonetheless,





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participants from both these categories reported (sometimes major) personal and professional changes resulting from their time on the program.

<sup>76</sup> Clark, J. & Lewis, S. (2016). *Impact Beyond Volunteering: A Realist Evaluation of the Complex and Long-term Pathways of Volunteer Impact*, VSO.

<sup>77</sup> Participants who did not find a career benefit despite hoping and expecting that it would: participants #03, #11, #20, #24, #26, #30, #31, #35, #36, #39, #47 and #52.

<sup>78</sup> Participants who experienced a career setback: participants #07, #16, #29, #41, #42 and #45.

<sup>79</sup> Participants #07 and #45.

<sup>80</sup> The researchers have also been informed that another participant (#45) in this group who was unemployed at T3 but who has since found full-time work that directly relates to the volunteer assignment.

<sup>81</sup> Of the *Transitioners*, three (#07, #29, #41) were classified as "Detrimental to career", five (#06, #24, #35, #39, #52) as not benefitting their career (either "Did not benefit career despite expecting or hoping it would" or "No major benefit to career and no expectation that it would"), and three (#08, #12, #54) "Benefitted career and had expected or hoped it would."

<sup>82</sup> Participants #01, #04, #07, #08, #11, #14, #19, #20, #23, #24, #26, #27, #29, #35, #37, #51, #52, #53 and #54.

<sup>83</sup> 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.

<sup>84</sup> Participants #02, #03, #09, #30, #31, #39, #40, #45 and #46.

<sup>85</sup> Excludes 12 *Veterans* and four *Non-working partners*.

<sup>86</sup> Four of the 14 came from Health related professions; three from Community/Social Development.

<sup>87</sup> Of the 14 participants who succeeded in undertaking prosocial career transitions: three worked with INGOs and one with an intergovernmental agency, seven performed a "mentoring" role, 13 reported increasing their "international development" literacy and 10 reported developing valuable professional networks. All these figures are over-represented relative to those who did not make this career transition.

<sup>88</sup> Eight of the 13 participants whose assignment inspired or guided them to subsequent formal education had achieved a prosocial career transition. Thus, more than half of those making this career transition (8/14) had enrolled in formal education program because of their experiences on the program.

<sup>89</sup> Participants: #01, #07, #11, #14, #20, #24, #26, #27, #29, #30, #31, #35, #39, #41, #52 and #53.

<sup>90</sup> Participants #14, #24, #27, #29 and #31.

<sup>91</sup> Participants reporting improved "domain-specific knowledge or capabilities" as a principal professional outcome at T3: Specific technical knowledge and capabilities (#08, #17, #25, #26, #35, #36, #37, #40, #45, #47, #48, #51, #54 and #55), overall professional confidence (#01, #03, #07, #10, #23, #31, #40, #42, #44, #45 and #51).

<sup>92</sup> Participants reporting improved "role performance & management capabilities" as a principal professional outcome at T3: Role modelling or mentoring (#09, #22, #24, #26, #33 and #44), change management (#15 and #29), interpersonal capabilities (#03, #06, #08, #09, #28, #31 and #35), managing in a new area (#01, #19, #40, #43 and #45), other (#45, #47).

<sup>93</sup> Participants reporting improved "communication capabilities" as a principal professional outcome at T3: Participants #01, #06, #07, #09, #24, #26, #28, #31, #37, #39, #47, #48, #49 and #53.

<sup>94</sup> Participants reporting improved "cultural capabilities" as a principal professional outcome at T3: Cross-cultural awareness & competence (#03, #04, #07, #09 and #37), adaptability/flexibility (#06, #09, #17, #26, #30, #39, #46 and #47).

<sup>95</sup> Participants reporting "career direction or priorities" as a principal professional outcome at T3: Participants #04, #08, #09, #10, #19, #22, #23, #33, #44 and #53.

<sup>96</sup> The summaries in Section 5.3.1 and Figure 13 draw on data from both T2 and T3. T2 interviews collected more fine-grained examples of specific learning outcomes and the factors that contributed to those. The details of these are reported in Section 4.2 of the Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers: Phase Two Final Report (December 2020). T3 interviews focused on participants' view, 12 months later, of the strongest changes to their professional knowledge and capabilities, and the assignment features that they most strongly associated with these.

<sup>97</sup> One *Non-working Partner* who provided direct but informal support to the PO of their partner reported developing domain-specific capabilities from this "discretionary volunteering" (see Section 3.4.2).

<sup>98</sup> Comparison of participants whose assignments were deemed beneficial to their domain-specific capabilities at T3 (n = 36) and those whose assignments had not benefitted (n = 13), excluding *Non-working Partners*, on some relevant variables are: (i) Had lived in host country prior to assignment: benefitted = 11/36, not benefitted = 1/13; (ii) spoke host-country language at T1: benefitted = 7/36, not benefitted = 1/13; (iii) had strong or moderate host-country connections at T1: benefitted 13/36, not benefitted 1/13; (iv) career-related motives identified as the main motive for volunteering at T1: benefitted = 12/36, not benefitted 1/13; (v) reported a strong international focus for future plans at T1: benefitted = 19/36, not benefitted = 2/12; (vi) reported strong international focus to future plans at T3: benefitted = 18/36, not benefitted = 2/12; (vii) professional domain was in Health: benefitted = 5/36, not benefitted = 0/12; (viii) professional domain was in Community/Social Development: benefitted = 7/36, not benefitted = 0/12; (ix) professional domain was in Engineering/Architecture: benefitted = 1/36, not benefitted = 4/12; (x): beneficial career outcomes achieved at T3: benefitted = 20/36, not benefitted = 2/12.

<sup>99</sup> Australian Volunteers Program Global Program Strategy 2018-2022.

<sup>100</sup> At T2, the groups reporting the highest proportion of domain-specific learning outcomes were *Imposed Transitioners* (21%), *Launchers* (17%), *Transitioners* (16%) and *Enhancers* (12%). *Career Breakers* (9%), *Veterans* (7%) and *Non-working Partners* (9%) reported smaller proportions. Full details can be found at Attachment 8.1 of Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers: Phase Two Final Report (December 2020).

<sup>101</sup> Australian Volunteers Program Global Program Strategy 2018-2022.

<sup>102</sup> Participants reporting legitimacy benefits from their assignment were: #01, #02, #04, #14, #28, #35, #44, #46 and #47. The three reported no noticeable improvement in domain-specific capabilities were #14, #44 and #47.



<sup>103</sup> This finding is consistent with the results of T2, where over third of domain-specific learning outcomes stemmed from participants performing “stretch” roles (24/71). Just 13% (9/71) came from collaborations or consultations with others, and 4% from being able to observe (positive) role models. See Section 4.2.3, Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers: Phase Two Final Report (December 2020).

<sup>104</sup> Participants #01, #04, #08, #09, #19, #23, #26, #28, #29, #31, #35, #39, #40, #46 and #53.

<sup>105</sup> Participants #01, #02, #03, #04, #05, #06, #07, #08, #09, #17, #19, #23, #24, #25, #26, #27, #28, #29, #30, #31, #33, #35, #39, #43, #44, #46, #47, #53 and #55.

<sup>106</sup> Participants whose study plans reflect a distinctive feature of the local culture: #08, #09, #29, and #43; participants whose planned studies involve the cross-cultural application of their professional training or backgrounds: #08 and #33.

<sup>107</sup> Australian Volunteers Program Global Program Strategy 2018-2022.

<sup>108</sup> Participants #01, #02, #05, #06, #09, #19, #22, #27, #28, #29, #31, #35, #37, #40, #42, #44, #45, #46, #47, #51, #53 and #54.

<sup>109</sup> This proportion (22/41) excludes participants who expressed no interest in future careers (most *Veterans* and *Non-working Partners*).

<sup>110</sup> These were not the only networks that benefitted participants professionally; as noted in Section 4.3, networks with volunteers and POs that were primarily social also contributed career benefits.

<sup>111</sup> Participants #02, #06 #19, #28, #35, #37, #40, #44, #45 and #54.

<sup>112</sup> Participants #02, #28, #35, #40, #44 and #45.

<sup>113</sup> Participants #02 and #40.

<sup>114</sup> Participants #01, #19, #22, #37, #46 and #53.

<sup>115</sup> We use the term “volunteers” here broadly to include all participants of the program, including AADs.

<sup>116</sup> Participants in the study came from 13/15 occupational categories identified under ANZSCO - Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2019); 13/14 if Youth/Student/Other is excluded.

<sup>117</sup> Section 2.3.2, Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers: Phase One Final Report (October 2019). Also see Clark, J. & Lewis, S (2016). *Impact Beyond Volunteering: A Realist Evaluation of the Complex and Long-term Pathways of Volunteer Impact*, VSO; Australian Red Cross. (2015). *Strengthening Global Development through International Volunteering: How Returned Volunteers Contribute and Build Development Capacity*; McWha, I. (2011). The roles and relationships between expatriates, volunteers, and local development workers. *Development in Practice*, 21(1), 29-40.

<sup>118</sup> COVID generally impeded participants’ professional development (by truncating some assignments) and reducing career options; however, it should be noted that at least three participants (#02, #21, #33) found employment in roles relating to COVID response interventions in Australia that provided outlets for them to apply knowledge and skills developed during their assignments.

<sup>119</sup> No noticeable differences existed in the nature or quantity of learning outcomes reported by *Transitioners* and other groups at T2.

<sup>120</sup> Akkermans, J., Seibert, S.E. & Mol, S.T. (2018). Tales of the unexpected: Integrating career shocks in the contemporary careers literature. *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology*, 44(1), 1-10; Akkermans, J., Richardson, J. & Kraimer, M.L. (2020). The COVID-19 crisis as a career shock: Implications for careers and vocational behavior. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 119, 103434.

<sup>121</sup> Participants #12, #41 and #45.

<sup>122</sup> Kierner, A. & Suutari, V. (2018). Repatriation of international dual-career couples. *Thunderbird International Business Review*, 60(6), 885-895; Kimber, J.A. (2019). Repatriation: A qualitative study of repatriates after returning from China assignments. *Journal of Global Mobility*, 7(4), 381-394; Szkudlarek, B. (2010). Reentry - A review of the literature. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 34(1), 1-21.

<sup>123</sup> 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.

<sup>124</sup> Bird, A. (2001). International assignments and careers as repositories of knowledge. In M.E. Mendenhall, T.M. Kuhlmann & G.K. Stahl (Eds). *Developing Global Business Leaders - Policies, Processes, and Innovations*, Quorum Books, 19-36. Nonaka, I. (1994). A dynamic theory of organizational knowledge creation, *Organization Science*, 5(1), 14-37.

<sup>125</sup> 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.

<sup>126</sup> Szreter, S. & Woolcock, M. (2004). Health by association? Social capital, social theory, and the political economy of public health. *International Journal of Epidemiology*, 33, 650-67.

<sup>127</sup> Participants reporting no noticeable personal changes from their time on the program were: participants #20, #29, #34, #36, #50, #51, #52 and #54. Participant #41 reported generally negative personal consequences. Others (e.g. #14, #45) weighed negative consequences with some positive changes.

<sup>128</sup> For example, participants #11, #19, #20, #27, #37, #46 and #51.

<sup>129</sup> Piaget, J. (1955). *The Child’s Construction of Reality*. Routledge; Rumelhart, D.E. & Norman, D. (1978). Accretion tuning and restructuring: Three modes of learning. In J. W. Cotton & R. Klatzky (Eds.), *Semantic Factors in Cognition*, (pp. 37-60), Erlbaum.

<sup>130</sup> The definition of “meaning” is adapted from: Pratt, M.G. & Ashforth, B.E. (2003). Fostering meaningfulness in working and at work. In K.S. Cameron, J.E. Dutton, & R.E. Quinn (Eds.), *Positive Organizational Scholarship: Foundations of a New Discipline* (pp. 309-327). Berrett-Koehler.

<sup>131</sup> Participants reporting each of the six categories of lifestyle change are: (i) Health conscious (participants #04, #07, #09, #20, #25 and #37), (ii) Priority to relationships (participants #01, #09, #20, #37, #43, #46 and #55), (iii) Environment and sustainability (participants #11, #18, #25, #35, #43 and #46), (iv) Anti-consumption (participants #05, #10, #12, #18, #21,



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#30, #34, #42, #47 and #55), (v) Work-life balance (participants #02, #06, #26, #39, #49 and #53), and (vi) Other (participants #31, #33 and #40).

<sup>132</sup> Of the 28 participants who developed capabilities that were classified as “global mindset”, 19 reported lifestyle changes; of the 26 who did not develop their “global mindset”, 10 reported lifestyle changes. Of the 18 participants who developed capabilities that were classified as “cognitive empathy”, 13 reported lifestyle changes; of the 36 who did not develop their “cognitive empathy”, 16 reported lifestyle changes.

<sup>133</sup> Of the 24 participants who reported a challenging repatriation, 16 reported lifestyle changes; of the 24 who did not report challenging repatriation, eight reported lifestyle changes.

<sup>134</sup> Participants #11, #17, #24 and #55.

<sup>135</sup> Participants #04, #05, #07, #08, #09, #10, #12, #14, #20, #21, #23, #24, #28, #29, #37, #41, #42, #43, #45, #46, #47, #48, #52 and #53.

<sup>136</sup> Examples of those describing these challenges were: Being unable to finish project/s or inform colleagues before their rushed departure from the host country – most repatriated participants; Unfamiliar living and social settings - participants #24, #26, #28, #38, #46 and #54; Family bereavements or illnesses - participants #09, #22, #32 and #36; Extended isolation from family, friends or other support networks - participants #22, #43 and #45; Financial insecurity due to loss of regular income – participants #12, #24, #41, #42 and #45.

<sup>137</sup> Participants #14, #20, #21, #28, #29, #41, #42, #45 and #46.

<sup>138</sup> Participants #07, #12, #43, #47, #52 and #53.

<sup>139</sup> These include participants #21, #23, #43 and #46.

<sup>140</sup> Of the 9 participants who did seek out professional support for mental health challenges and the 15 participants who either sought it out or who considered seeking professional support: all 15 had lived overseas, 5/9 and 7/15 had lived in the host country; 5/9 and 6/15 spoke the host country language, 5/9 and 9/15 had strong international orientations at T1 (i.e. were seeking a future that was based or involved large portions of their time overseas), and 4/9 and 7/15 had strong connections with the host country at T3.

<sup>141</sup> Of the 9 participants who did seek out professional support for mental health challenges and the 15 participants who either sought it out or who considered seeking professional support: 5/9 and 8/15 were first-time volunteers.

<sup>142</sup> Of the 9 participants who did seek out professional support for mental health challenges and the 15 participants who either sought it out or who considered seeking professional support: none reported program support as being positive during the assignment and 2/9 and 6/15 reported program support as primarily negative (T2).

<sup>143</sup> Of the 9 participants who did seek out professional support for mental health challenges, 3/9 reported living in a rural area at T1.

<sup>144</sup> Of the 9 participants who did seek out professional support for mental health challenges and the 15 participants who either sought it out or who considered seeking professional support: 8/9 and 12/15 were not accompanied. 4/19 accompanied participants reported challenging repatriations, compared with 18/35 of those who were unaccompanied.

<sup>145</sup> Of the 9 participants who did seek out professional support for mental health challenges and the 15 participants who either sought it out or who considered seeking professional support: 0/9 and 1/15 reported increasing their civic engagement from T1-T3; 1/9 and 2/15 reported remote volunteering; 4/9 and 6/15 reported being open to future in-country volunteering at T3; and 0/15 reported ongoing PO support at T3.

<sup>146</sup> The role of VPLJ activities, notably PDBs and ICOPs in helping forge friendships among volunteers was a key finding in earlier reports: see Section 5.3.2, Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers: Phase One Final Report (October 2019) and Section 5.3.1, Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers: Phase Two Final Report (December 2020).

<sup>147</sup> Just one participant reported a decline in the quality of relationships with family, unrelated to the program. Participants reporting giving higher priority to family relationships were: participants #01, #09, #20, #28, #37, #38, #43, #46 and #55.

<sup>148</sup> Participants #08, #27, #28 and #36.

<sup>149</sup> Examples are participants #05, #12, #22 and #34.

<sup>150</sup> See, for example, Eraut, M. (2004). Informal learning in the workplace. *Studies in Continuing Education*, 26(2), 247-273; Fee, A. & Gray, S.J. (2011). Fast-tracking expatriate development: the unique learning environments of international volunteer placements. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 22(3), 530-552; Marsick, V.J. & Watkins, K. (1990). *Informal and Incidental Learning in the Workplace*, Routledge.

<sup>151</sup> Studies identifying the features of “learning intensive” work environments are: Billett, S. (2001). *Learning in the Workplace: Strategies for Effective Practice*, Allen & Unwin; Cheetham, G. & Chivers, G. (2001). How professionals learn in practice: An investigation of informal learning amongst people working in professions. *Journal of European Industrial Training*, 25(5), 246-292; Fuller, A. & Unwin, L. (2004). Expansive learning environments: Integrating organizational and personal development. In *Workplace Learning in Context*. H. Rainbird, A. Fuller & A. Munro (Eds). Routledge, 126-144; 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.

<sup>152</sup> 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.

<sup>153</sup> 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.

<sup>154</sup> Section 3.2.1, Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers: Phase Two Final Report (December 2020).

<sup>155</sup> See, for instance, Section 3.2.1, Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers: Phase Two Final Report (December 2020).

<sup>156</sup> Pratt, M.G. & Ashforth, B.E. (2003). Fostering meaningfulness in working and at work. In K.S. Cameron, J.E. Dutton, & R.E. Quinn (Eds.), *Positive Organizational Scholarship: Foundations of a New Discipline* (pp. 309-327). Berrett-Koehler; Rosso, B.D., Dekas, K.H. & Wrzesniewski, A. (2010). On the meaning of work: A theoretical integration and review. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 30(1), 91-127.





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- <sup>157</sup> 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.
- <sup>158</sup> Starr, J.M. (1994). Peace Corps service as a turning point. *The International Journal of Aging and Human Development*, 39(2), 137-161.
- <sup>159</sup> Evans, D. & Abrahamse, W. (2009). Beyond rhetoric: the possibilities of and for 'sustainable lifestyles'. *Environmental Politics*, 18(4), 486-502.
- <sup>160</sup> Goldblatt, D.L. (2005). *Sustainable Energy Consumption and Society: Personal, technological, or social change?* Springer.
- <sup>161</sup> In some cases, these opportunities to experience "development in practice" were available vicariously to partners.
- <sup>162</sup> These changes may also reflect, at least in part, the changing circumstances created by COVID. See, for example: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2021), Household Impacts of COVID-19 Survey (14 July 2021). Available online: <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/household-impacts-covid-19-survey/latest-release#life-after-the-covid-19-pandemic>
- <sup>163</sup> Kierner, A. & Suutari, V. (2018). Repatriation of international dual-career couples. *Thunderbird International Business Review*, 60(6), 885-895; Szkudlarek, B. (2010). Reentry - A review of the literature. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 34(1), 1-21.
- <sup>164</sup> Guimaraes-Costa, N. & Cunha, M.P.E. (2009). Foreign locals. *Organizational Dynamics*, 2(38), 158-166.
- <sup>165</sup> Heathershaw, J. (2016). Who are the 'international community'? Development professionals and liminal subjectivity, *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, 10(1), 77-96.
- <sup>166</sup> In general, demographic characteristics associated with psychological distress and social difficulties readjusting include being female, single and young. Assignment features include substantial HCN contact, large distance between the home and host culture, and the extent of disengagement from home-country nationals (i.e. immersion in the host culture). For a review of the literature see: Szkudlarek, B. (2010). Reentry - A review of the literature. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 34(1), 1-21. Also see Van Gorp, L., Boroş, S., Bracke, P. & Stevens, P.A. (2017). Emotional support on re-entry into the home country: does it matter for repatriates' adjustment who the providers are?. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 58, 54-68.
- <sup>167</sup> Fanari, A. & Segrin, C. (2021). Longitudinal effects of US students' reentry shock on psychological health after returning home during the COVID-19 global pandemic. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 82, 298-310.
- <sup>168</sup> See, for example, Jo, J.K., Harrison, D.A. & Gray, S.M. (2021). The ties that cope? Reshaping social connections in response to pandemic distress. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 106(9), 1267-1282; Klaver, J.S. & Lambrechts, W. (2021). The pandemic of productivity: A narrative inquiry into the value of leisure time. *Sustainability*, 13(11), 6271.
- <sup>169</sup> Section 5.3.1, Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers: Phase Two Final Report (December 2020).
- <sup>170</sup> Section 5.3.2, Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers: Phase One Final Report (October 2019).
- <sup>171</sup> Sections 3.2.4 and 4.2.3, Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers: Phase Two Final Report (December 2020).
- <sup>172</sup> Section 3.2.4 and 4.2.3, Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers: Phase Two Final Report (December 2020).
- <sup>173</sup> The suggestion to retain close connections with contacts from home- and host-communities has parallels to Berry's well-know model of acculturation. Numerous studies emphasise the benefits of this "integrated" approach. Sources: Berry, J. W. (1992). Acculturation and adaptation in a new society. *International Migration*, 30, 69-85; Berry, J. W. (2005). Acculturation: Living successfully in two cultures. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 29(6), 697-712; Chia, A. L., & Costigan, C. L. (2006). A person-centred approach to identifying acculturation groups among Chinese Canadians. *International Journal of Psychology*, 41(5), 397-412.
- <sup>174</sup> This point was raised in T2 interviews by several volunteers whose assignments were based in remote locations. See Section 5.3.1, Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers: Phase Two Final Report (December 2020).
- <sup>175</sup> It may be more difficult for volunteers from minority backgrounds to establish relationships with other volunteers. See: Byrne, D. (1971). *The Attraction Paradigm*. Academic Press ; Montoya, R. M., & Horton, R. S. (2013). A meta-analytic investigation of the processes underlying the similarity-attraction effect. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 30(1), 64-94.
- <sup>176</sup> See, for example, Fee, A., Heizmann, H., & Gray, S.J. (2017). Towards a theory of effective cross-cultural capacity development: the experiences of Australian international NGO expatriates in Vietnam. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 28(14), 2036-2061.
- <sup>177</sup> Ellström, P. E. (2011). Informal learning at work: Conditions, processes and logics. In M. Malloch, L. Cairns, K. Evans & B.N. O'Conno (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Workplace Learning* (pp. 105-119). Sage.
- <sup>178</sup> Marsick, V.J. & Watkins, K. (1990). *Informal and Incidental Learning in the Workplace*.

