



**Flinders**  
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# Re-imagining volunteering:

## Older adults and volunteering in South Australia

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## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This project was designed to contribute knowledge regarding the experience of adult volunteers and non-volunteers (aged 70 years and over) and volunteering involving organisations (VIOs) in South Australia. It aimed to:

1. Document current South Australian volunteers' satisfaction with volunteering, and the extent to which their goals, skills and interests are matched to their volunteer role
2. Document the current relevance of the COVID-19 pandemic to the experiences of volunteers and VIOs and
3. Identify barriers and facilitators to volunteering for older South Australians, from the perspectives of non-volunteers and VIOs.

The views of 405 older South Australians and 51 representatives of VIOs were gathered through a suite of surveys and interviews. As well several key organisations in the volunteering sector, comprising the South Australian Department of Human Services, Volunteering SA/NT, Southern Volunteering SA, Northern Volunteering SA and the Multicultural Communities Council of SA contributed information to this project.

The main findings of the project indicate that:

- a. Older adults who continued to volunteer during COVID-19 found volunteering highly satisfying, were very satisfied with the VIOs they volunteered with, and experienced a strong alignment between their goals and the volunteering opportunities available to them.
- b. A substantial number of VIOs faced difficulties associated with COVID-19, especially re-engaging or recruiting volunteers.
- c. Non-volunteers provided important information about the need for flexible volunteering opportunities (e.g., fitting with schedule, roles that appealed, being able to stop at any time) to increase volunteering. Other important factors were feeling safe and secure, being asked directly to volunteer, being part of a well-known organisation, having training provided, feeling good as a result of volunteering, free background checks, and being sure that age discrimination would not be encountered.
- d. The most critical current issues according to VIOs are:
  - the disruption resulting from COVID-19,
  - the importance of providing flexible opportunities for older volunteers that match their skills and abilities,
  - challenges around managing administrative and regulatory requirements,
  - the need for more effective marketing and communication, including promoting the benefits to prospective volunteers.

The project also identified the need for further research with older people who ceased volunteering during the pandemic and the need to identify and develop flexible volunteering opportunities that match the skills, interests and abilities of people aged 70+ and VIOs.

Based on its findings, the project offers the following recommendations:

1. Establish a working group including VIOs and volunteers to examine the feasibility of a coordinated central system for recording and communicating volunteering opportunities (e.g., a codesigned central electronic repository). Ideally, this system:
  - a. could be maintained in real-time
  - b. would include a matching function that allows the skills and interests of the volunteers to be matched with volunteering opportunities, and
  - c. would facilitate 'offline' communication of volunteering opportunities to those without online access.
2. Develop workshops and/or a toolkit for organisations considering volunteer recruitment about identifying and defining flexible roles, and for existing VIOs about redefining roles in ways that promote additional flexible opportunities for older volunteers.
3. Establish a working group including volunteers, VIOs, and regulators to inform and develop pathways in volunteering that:
  - a. Ensure necessary regulations and requirements are both effectively streamlined and appropriately applied across different volunteering contexts.
  - b. Provide training that support flexibility in volunteering across VIOs and meets regulatory requirements.
  - c. Provide appropriate and standardised training for older volunteers facing difficulty with IT and accessing information online
4. Use targeted qualitative research approaches to gain a better understanding of the experiences of diverse older volunteer groups including (a) those who have currently paused volunteering as a result of COVID-19 and may be concerned about re-engaging, and (b) older people from CALD and other diverse backgrounds.

The research team was composed by Associate Professor Tim Windsor (Flinders University), Professor Sue Gordon (Flinders University), Dr Leeann Mahlo (Flinders University) and Dr Edoardo Rosso (ACH Group).

The research team acknowledges the collaboration and support of Office for Ageing Well, SA Health, the South Australian Department of Human Services, Volunteering SA/NT, Southern Volunteering SA, Northern Volunteering SA, the Multicultural Communities Council of SA, and ACH Group.

## 2. INTRODUCTION

Volunteering refers to “time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain” (Volunteering Australia, 2015). Volunteering provides broad social and economic benefits, and promotes community engagement, increased social and human capital, enhanced well-being, and decreased health inequality (Jenkins et al., 2013; Kragt & Holtrop, 2018; United Nations Volunteering, 2011). Volunteering comprises both formal, structured volunteering through an organisation, and informal volunteer activities outside of the organisational context, including the provision of aid or support to non-household members (Volunteering Australia, 2015, 2021a). The present report is focused specifically on formal volunteering. In 2019, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) reported that one quarter (24.5%) of people aged 70 years and over reported engaging in formal volunteering (ABS, 2019).

A substantial amount of research indicates that volunteering in older adulthood is associated with better psychosocial health and well-being and greater longevity. (Anderson et al. 2014; Jenkinson et al., 2013; Jongenelis et al., 2021; Jongenelis & Pettigrew, 2020; Matthews & Nazroo, 2021; Morrow-Howell, 2010; Tabassum et al. 2016). Notably, recent Australian-based research has demonstrated a beneficial causal relationship between participating in volunteering and psychosocial health (e.g., purpose in life, life satisfaction, and personal growth) among older adults (Jongenelis et al., 2021).

To date, no research has focused specifically on the volunteering context for older people within South Australia, meaning that the role and experiences of older South Australian volunteers is not well documented or understood. For example, while over two thirds (67.1%) of South Australian VIOs count people aged 75 and over among their volunteer base, only 2.7% of people who were recently surveyed to inform the Volunteering Strategy for South Australia were aged 75 and above. (Maher, 2020).

### 2.1 Impact of COVID-19 on Volunteering

The impact of COVID-19 on volunteering has been substantial. Prior to the emergence of COVID-19, rates of volunteering across Australia were already in decline in younger age groups (ABS 2019) and overall, from 2014 to 2019, there was a 20% decrease in the total contribution of volunteer hours (i.e., a loss of 743.3 million hours per annum; ABS, 2019). However, pre-COVID rates of volunteering among older people appeared to remain somewhat consistent. The most recent figures from the ABS (2019) showed that 24.5% of people aged 70 and above were engaged in formal volunteering compared to 27.6% of 75–85-year-olds and 12.4% of people aged 85 years and older in 2010 (ABS, 2010).

Two recent reports outline the substantial impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Australian volunteer sector: first, Volunteering Australia commissioned the Australian National University (ANU) Centre for Social Research and Methods (2020) to conduct a survey of more than 3,000 Australians in the early stages of the pandemic. Results indicated that over two-thirds (65.9%) of volunteers had stopped volunteering between February and April 2020, equivalent to an estimated reduction of 12.2 million hours per week. Notably, volunteers aged 65 years and over were more likely to have stopped volunteering than any other age group. The authors suggest that this was most likely due to social distancing regulations and the risks associated with COVID-19 exposure for older adults. While Australians, on average, were found to have experienced large declines in life satisfaction

during the early stages of the pandemic, there was evidence of a protective effect (i.e., significantly smaller declines in life satisfaction) for individuals who continued to volunteer throughout this period. Furthermore, people who continued to volunteer also reported substantially lower levels of psychological distress, compared to those who had either stopped volunteering or who had never volunteered (ANU, 2020). These findings are consistent with recent longitudinal research showing that the beneficial effects of volunteering on older adults' mental health and well-being appear to diminish when volunteering is discontinued (Matthews & Nazroo, 2021), suggesting that the retention of older volunteers in volunteering roles is an important consideration for maintaining well-being.

Several different biopsychosocial mechanisms are theorised to account for the positive relationship between volunteering and older adults' well-being, including social integration and generativity, altruism, role enhancement and/or substitution following retirement, purposefulness, self-efficacy, physical health, brain health (including neurogenesis—i.e., formation of new neurons), and acquisition of new cognitive skills (Anderson et al., 2014; Morrow-Howell, 2010). Recent empirical research has demonstrated that feeling appreciated for one's efforts and believing that others are benefiting from one's contribution, along with the perceived social and mental intensity of the role, are particularly important aspects of volunteering that contribute to greater well-being among older adults (Jongeneelis & Pettigrew, 2020; Matthews & Nazroo, 2021). Moreover, perceptions of volunteering as providing a sense of meaning and purpose may well increase with age (Tabassum et al., 2016).

Second, in the period December 2020—January 2021, Volunteering Australia (2021b) surveyed 584 representatives from VIOs (comprising volunteer managers, coordinators, and leaders [79%], and some volunteers [16%]) and found that volunteering participation had not recovered to pre-COVID levels, even as COVID-19 restrictions were lifting. For example, nearly three-quarters (72%) of respondents reported that their volunteer programs were not fully operational, and over forty percent were not confident that they would achieve pre-COVID levels of volunteering activity in the following six months. Forty-three percent reported increased demand for the services their organisation offers, and more than half (56%) reported needing more volunteers. Nearly two-thirds (60%) of respondents indicated that re-engaging and recruiting volunteers was a pressing issue, and 41% reported some level of difficulty achieving optimal re-engagement and recruitment levels. Respondents also highlighted needing ongoing support and guidance with re-engaging volunteers in a COVID-safe way (48%), ensuring the mental health and well-being of their volunteers (40%), and adapting volunteer programs to meet the changing needs of volunteers (40%).

To our knowledge, no data on the specific effects of COVID-19 on older volunteers and VIOs in South Australia has been collected. Moreover, as we traverse the second year of the global pandemic, current data on the effects of the pandemic and the extent of recovery of the volunteer sector in South Australia is needed. Therefore, this study fills an important gap, and will have implications for volunteering policy and practice.

## 2.2 Older Adult Volunteers and the South Australian Context

According to the Department of Human Services (DHS; 2018), prior to COVID, 20% of South Australia's formal volunteers were aged 65 years and over—slightly less than national

figures (see above), despite South Australia having the second oldest population of all states and territories within Australia (ABS, 2020). Recent research conducted by the University of Adelaide (also pre-COVID) showed that 71% of South Australian adults aged 55 years or older volunteered in some capacity (not including informal caregiving), and 40% indicated that volunteering was one of three main activities they were engaged in (McDougall & Barrie, 2020); however, recruitment for this sample was biased toward active volunteers and there were a relatively small number of respondents aged over 80. Nevertheless, significant themes associated with volunteering emerged from this study, including the flexibility and variety of available roles and importance of feeling valued as a volunteer, along with opportunities for intergenerational and/or cross-cultural exchange, and ultimately, ability to derive meaning and sense of purpose. Barriers to volunteering included out-of-pocket expenses (e.g., associated with transport/travel and telecommunications), and for most non-volunteers, being “too busy” (McDougall & Barrie, 2020). Notably, the information presented within this report considered people aged 55 years and over within a single category, thus including people in both later mid-life and older adulthood (with potentially different life contexts and associated developmental demands) and limiting our understanding of the unique perspective of older adults (i.e., aged 70 and above).

Several pilot programs have been initiated in South Australia to increase opportunities and engagement for older volunteers. Several of these programs have broadly focused on ways to better match older adults’ skills and interests with volunteering opportunities. For example, The City of Campbelltown Active Ageing Advisory Committee initiated the trialing of a ‘skills register or bank’ as a means of recording and sharing skills and talents of older retirees interested in engaging with their communities as part of a project funded by Office for Ageing Well, SA Health in 2017-18. In 2015, Yup Yup Labs and ACH Group partnered to develop the ‘Spare Time’ project which was initiated with the goal of developing a user-friendly digital platform to support older adults in seeking engagement opportunities around paid and unpaid work.

In April 2019, the Office for Ageing Well funded a two-year program implemented by Southern Volunteering (SA) Inc., called ‘Valuing Individuals’ Background & Experience’ (VIBE). The program was all about volunteer-role matching. It was designed to promote meaningful volunteering opportunities that effectively draw on the acquired skills, experience, and interests of people across the second half of the adult lifespan. The aims were two-fold: (1) to enhance links between volunteers and meaningful volunteer roles; and (2) to support VIOs to provide opportunities that optimise older peoples’ skills and experience. The preliminary findings of the VIBE Project indicate that volunteers who have participated in it experienced a sense of satisfaction from contributing and making a difference, appreciating the opportunity to use and share both previously acquired and newly developed skills, along with increased self-worth, confidence, social connection, and respect from others (see Southern Volunteering SA Inc., 2021). VIOs also described benefitting from the VIBE project and highlighted how the process of volunteer-role matching helped them to connect with volunteers who are well-suited, enthusiastic, and engaged, and have skills, interests and personal attributes that can be well-utilised within their organisation. In the concluding section of this report we discuss the implications of our findings related to the potential value of future similar projects aimed at creating coordinated systems for matching volunteer skills and interests with opportunities.



### 2.3 The Re-imagining Volunteering Project

This project was concerned with three broad aims:

- 1) To document older current South Australian volunteers' satisfaction with volunteering, and the extent to which their goals, skills and interests are matched by their volunteer role
- 2) To document the current relevance of the COVID-19 pandemic to the experiences of volunteers and VIOs.
- 3) To identify barriers and facilitators to volunteering for older South Australians, from the perspectives of both non-volunteers and VIOs.

### 3. METHOD

A mixed-methods approach sought the views of older adult volunteers, non-volunteers and representatives of VIOs via online surveys (quantitative) and interviews with representatives of VIOs (qualitative).

#### 3.1 Community Survey of Older South Australians

The survey distributed to community-based older adults was put together by the research team, drawing on previous research on volunteers (e.g., Clary et al., 1998; Stukas et al., 2016) to inform selection of questions and incorporating feedback from project stakeholders. The aim was to collect information on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, current volunteer status, and perceptions about volunteering skills. In addition, current volunteers were asked about their volunteer satisfaction, volunteer-role matching, and perceived organisational support. Non-active volunteers were asked about potential barriers and facilitators associated with volunteering.

##### 3.1.1 Characteristics of the Community Survey Sample

Participants were older adults who responded to calls to participate circulated through online networks including the Office for Ageing Well (OfAW) Weekend Plus publication, the OfAW feedback network, and VIO networks. This report uses data provided by 405 adults ranging in age from 70 to 89 (330 volunteers and 75 non-volunteers) who provided information on their current volunteering status via an online survey. Characteristics of the survey sample are provided in Table 1.

**Table 1. Characteristics of the community sample of older adults**

	Volunteers	Non-volunteers
<i>n</i>	330	75
Age M(SD)	74.5 (3.9)	74.3 (4.0)
Female %	50.3	49.3
Race		
White/Caucasian %	96.7	93.2
Asian %	0.3	1.4
Mixed %	0.6	1.4
Other %	2.4	4.1
Education		
Did not complete high school %	9.4	4.1
Completed high school %	22.4	21.6
Some college or tertiary %	34.2	33.8
Bachelor's degree %	22.1	24.3
Postgraduate degree %	11.8	16.2
Relationship status		
Married or partnered %	75.8	57.3
Separated or divorced %	10.9	18.7
Widowed %	11.8	17.3
Never married %	1.5	2.7
Other	0.0	4.0

The sample included a relatively even split of men and women (3 participants either did not identify as male or female or chose not to specify their gender). The majority identified as white/Caucasian. The sample was more highly educated than the general older Australian

population (see <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/2071.0~2016~Main%20Features~Educational%20Qualifications%20Data%20Summary%20~65>) and particularly among volunteers, a high proportion were married or partnered (76% of volunteers, 57% of non-volunteers).

### 3.2 Survey of VIO Representatives

The online survey for representatives of VIOs was compiled by the research team, drawing on questions used in previous research (e.g., Volunteering Australia, 2021b; Warburton et al., 2007) and incorporating feedback from project stakeholders, to capture data regarding the current state of volunteering for older South Australians, the impact of COVID-19 on volunteer organisations, and perceived barriers and facilitators associated with volunteering for older people. VIO representatives were recruited through invitations circulated among networks of SA stakeholders including Volunteering SA/NT and the Department of Human Services.

#### 3.2.1 Characteristics of Participating Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIOs)

Respondents to the VIO survey included 47 representatives of a diverse range of organisations from aged care service providers to sporting bodies, community service groups and health and disability service providers. Almost all VIOs who responded to the relevant question (26 of 29; 89.7%) indicated that they currently required more volunteers. VIO responders were initially asked to classify their organisation into categories of 'education', 'animals', 'aged care', 'faith based' or 'other'. Those who selected 'other' provided a written description which we used to create additional categories (health and disability, environment, community services and information) to better capture the range of participating organisations. Table 2 shows the numbers and percentages of organisations in each category.

**Table 2. Participating VIOs**

Organisation type	<i>n</i>	%
Education	1	2
Sports	6	13
Animals	3	6
Aged care	8	17
Faith based	1	2
Health and disability	6	13
Environment	7	15
Community services and information	7	15
Other	8	17
Total	47	100

### 3.3 Interviews with VIO Representatives

To further complement and contextualise the information gathered via the VIO survey, telephone interviews were conducted with 6 representatives of VIOs recruited from contact lists provided by key stakeholder organisations, including Department of Human Services (DHS), Northern Volunteering South Australia (NVSA), Southern Volunteering South

Australia (SVSA) and Volunteering SA/NT. Interviewees represented several different categories of organisation including aged care service providers, community organisations and local government. The Research Assistant who conducted the interviews summarised key points of each interview, and interviewees had the opportunity to review and edit/add to those summaries to ensure we captured the central issues.

## **4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **4.1 Aim 1. Documenting the Experiences of Older South Australian Volunteers**

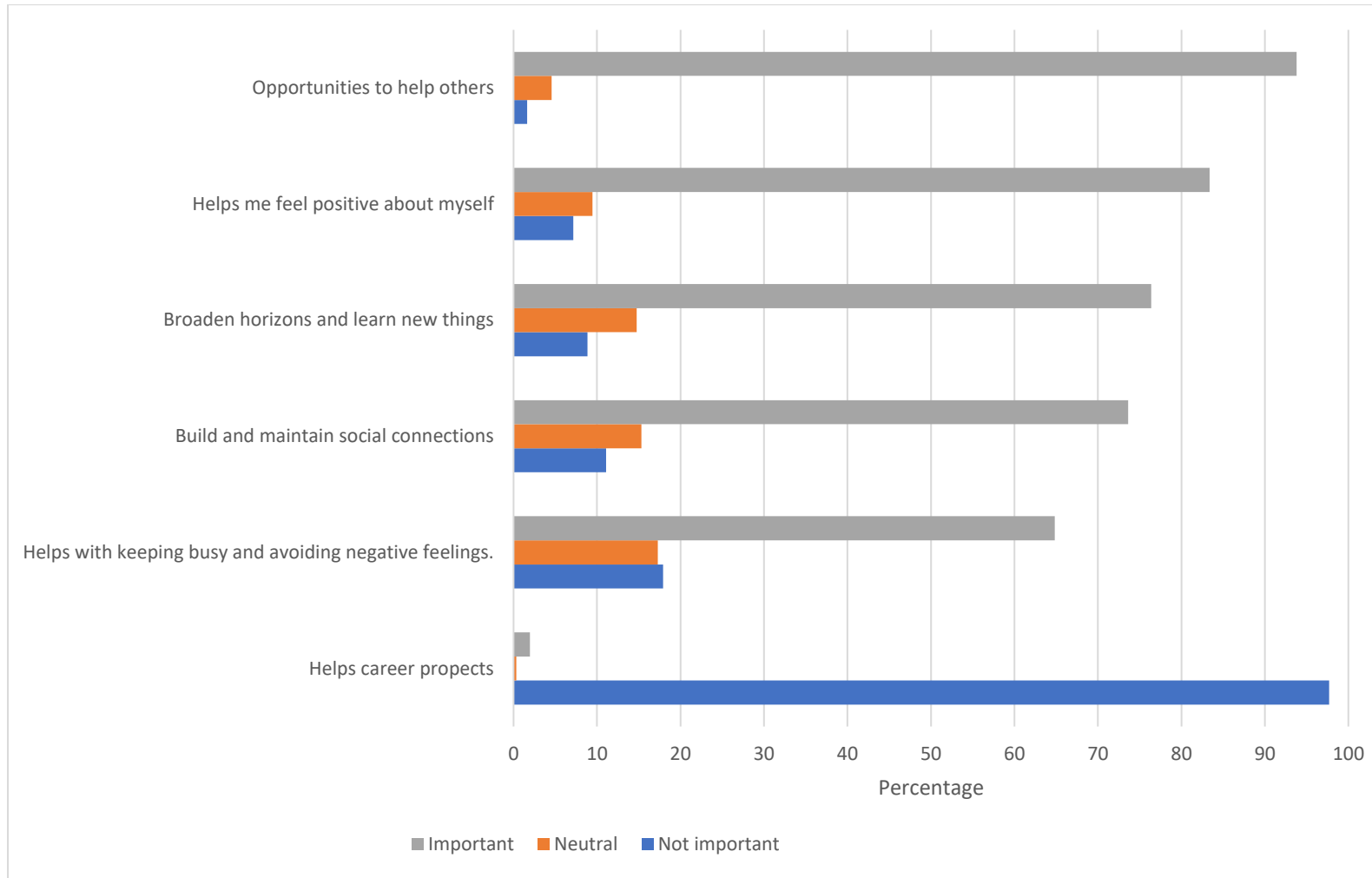
The analysis of survey responses from older South Australian volunteers shed considerable light on the broad nature of their volunteering experience, and overall revealed a high degree of satisfaction. This suggests that those older adults who have maintained their volunteer roles through COVID generally find those roles to be enjoyable and fulfilling. The section below summarises results based on older volunteers' responses to questions about their levels of engagement in volunteering, their goals and their satisfaction with the organisations that they volunteer with.

#### **4.1.1 Engagement in Volunteering**

Among the volunteers, most reported being involved in either one (36%) or two (33%) volunteer roles. During the month preceding the survey, volunteers reported volunteering for an average of 11.8 hours per week (SD = 11.5; range = 0-100 hours). As several respondents reported very high levels of volunteering ( $n = 12$  reported volunteering more than 35 hours per week), the sample median of 9 hours per week may be a better general indicator of typical levels of volunteer engagement.

#### **4.1.2 Motivation and Satisfaction**

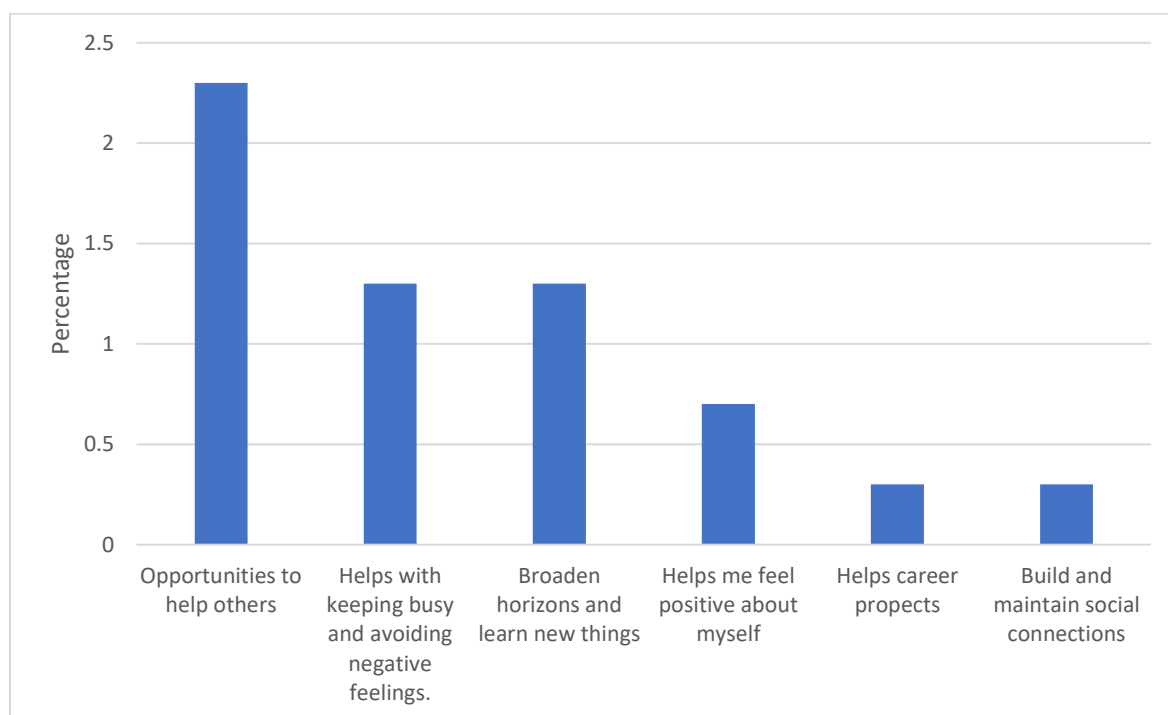
To better understand older volunteers' reasons for volunteering, we began by presenting a list of goals associated with volunteering adapted from Clary et al. (1998) and asked respondents to rate how important each goal was to them. Responses were provided on a scale from 1 (not at all important) to 5 (very important). Scores at each end of the rating scale were collapsed into not important (1 or 2), neutral (3) and important (4 or 5) and the percentages of participants endorsing each goal are shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1. Importance of goals related to volunteering (*ns* 305-307)**

The most endorsed goal associated with volunteering was the opportunity it provides to help others, with over 90% of respondents recognising this as an important goal. A high proportion of participants also recognised the value of volunteering in contributing to a positive sense of self. Around three quarters of participants indicated that learning new things and building and maintaining social connections were part of their motivation to volunteer. Around two-thirds recognised the role of volunteering in providing an opportunity for engagement that supported emotional well-being (“helps with keeping busy and avoiding negative feelings”). Unsurprisingly given this age group, only a small minority (under 2%) indicated that part of their reason for volunteering was to enhance their career prospects.

In addition to describing the importance of different motivations for volunteering among older South Australians, we were interested in determining the extent to which the reality of the volunteering experience allowed those expectations to be met. To answer this question, we also asked participants to rate on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 5 (a great deal) the extent to which their volunteering allowed them to meet the same goals listed in Figure 1. We were particularly interested in the proportion of participants who endorsed the importance of a specific goal, but at the same time rated that their volunteering did not provide opportunities to meet it (i.e., a mismatch between goals and the volunteer experience). The proportion of participants falling into such a mismatch category for each goal is shown in Figure 2.



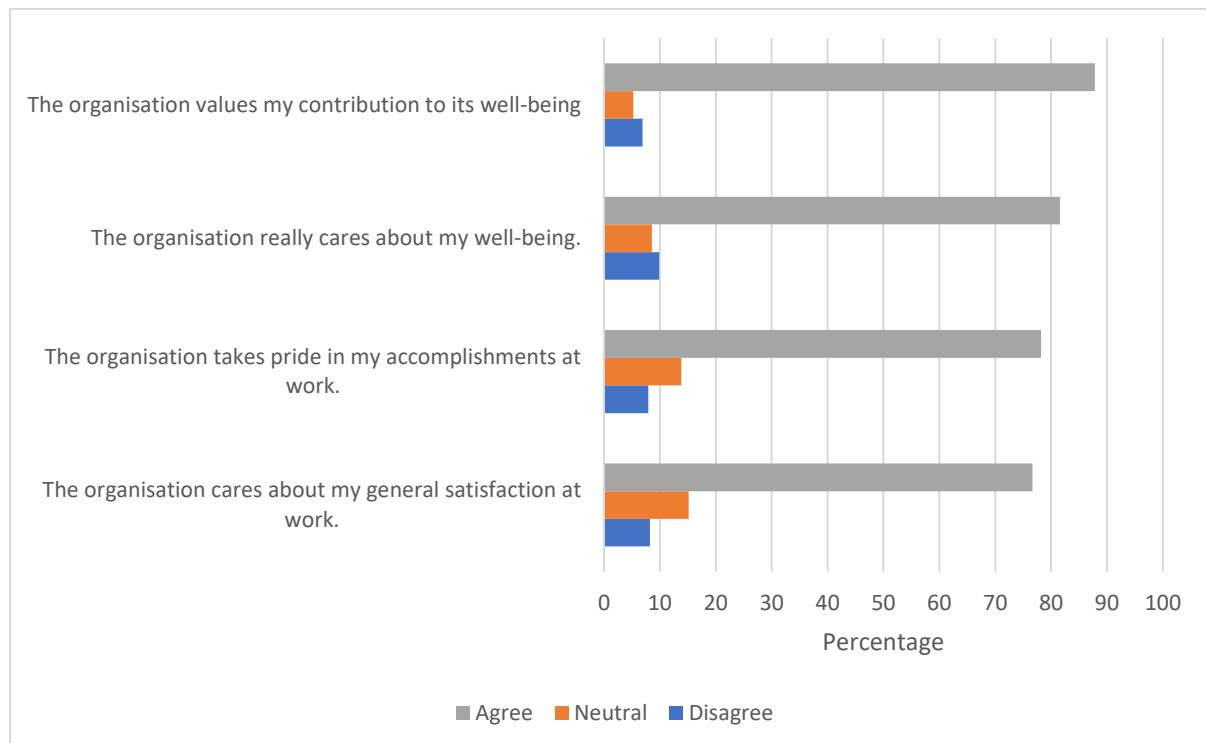
**Figure 2. Percentages of participants where volunteering goals were not fulfilled.**

Here it can be seen that few participants endorsed a goal as important but at the same time reported that their volunteering did not provide the opportunity to meet that goal. The goal with the highest ‘mismatch’ proportion was “opportunities to help others” where 2.3% ( $n = 7$ ) of participants fell into the mismatch category. Taken together, the results suggest a strong correspondence between volunteering goals and experiences among active South Australian volunteers aged 70 and over. Of course, interpreting these findings should also take selection effects into account. It is likely that volunteers who do not feel that their experiences match their goals or expectations will have dropped out or sought an alternative volunteering role that provides a better fit.

The correspondence between participants’ goals and opportunities to meet them through volunteering reported above was mirrored in participants’ direct ratings of satisfaction. We asked participants to rate their satisfaction with their volunteer roles (see Stukas et al., 2016), and the extent to which their roles matched their skills and interests. Almost all participants (96.0%) indicated that they were satisfied (33.4%) or very satisfied (62.6%) with the role where they currently volunteered the most. Similarly, 95% of respondents indicated that the match between their *skills* and their volunteer role was very good (50.2%) or excellent (45.2%), while 94.2% indicated that the match between their *interests* and their volunteer role was very good (46.5%) or excellent (47.7%).

#### 4.1.3 Organisational Support

We asked participants to rate on a scale from 0 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree) their agreement with a series of statements from Eisenberger et al.’s (1986) Survey of Perceived Organisational Support. We collapsed responses into categories of ‘Agree’, ‘Neutral’ and ‘Disagree’, and percentages of participant responses are shown in Figures 3 and 4. Figure 3 shows responses to questions regarding supportive aspects of organisations.

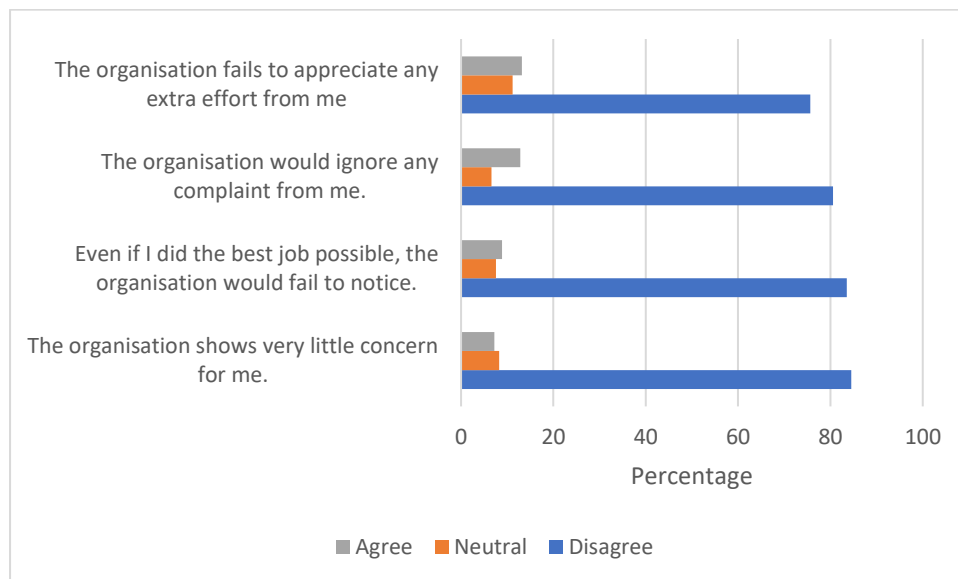


**Figure 3. Endorsement of supportive characteristics of volunteer organisations ( $ns$  303-304)**

The pattern of results suggests that most respondents found the primary VIO to be supportive. Over 80% of respondents agreed that their organisation valued their



contribution and cared about their well-being, while over three-quarters of participants agreed that the organisation cared about their satisfaction at work and took pride in their accomplishments.



**Figure 4. Endorsement of unsupportive characteristics of volunteer organisations (n = 304)**

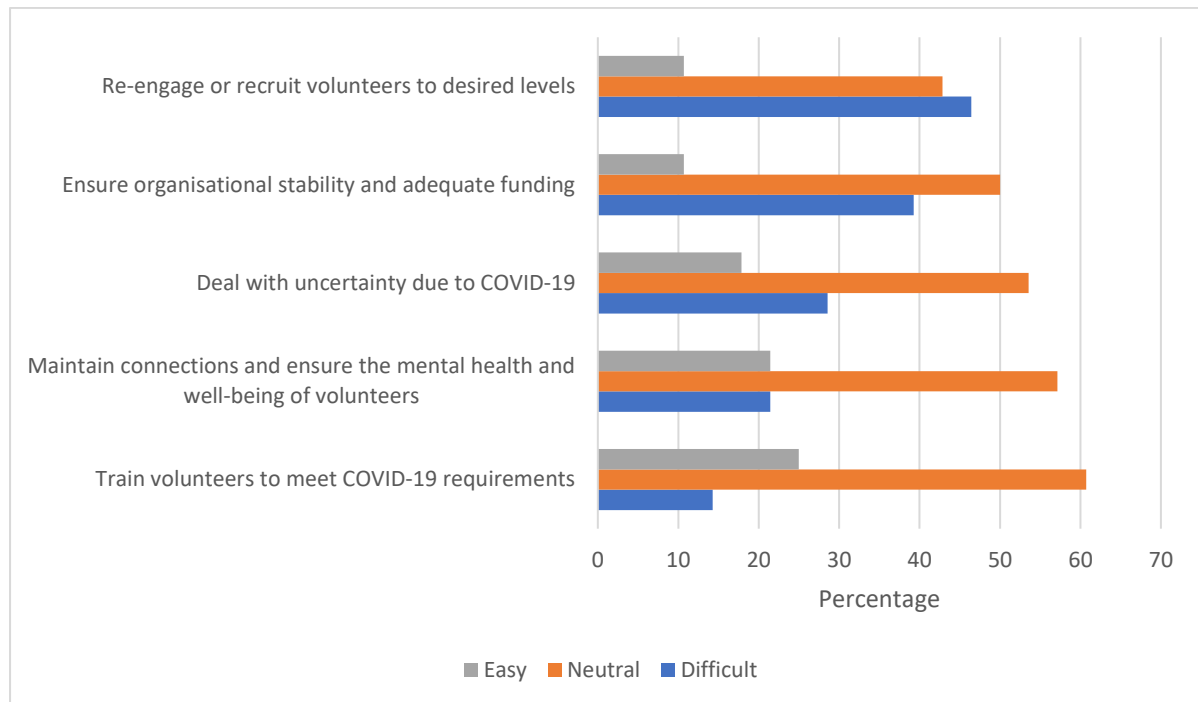
The generally high perceptions of satisfaction with older volunteers’ organisations were mirrored in responses to items concerning unsupportive organisational characteristics, shown above in Figure 4. Here, over 80% of participants disagreed that their organisation would ignore a complaint, fail to notice their efforts, or show little concern for them, and three-quarters disagreed that their organisation fails to appreciate their extra efforts.

#### 4.2 Aim 2. Older South Australian Volunteers, VIOs and COVID-19

Below, we draw on the survey responses of VIOs to gain insights into the impact of COVID-19 on the volunteer sector in South Australia. Overall, the findings pointed to a substantial minority of VIOs experiencing difficulties, with just under half reporting difficulties in recruiting or re-engaging volunteers. These results provide an important snapshot of challenges faced by the sector as of June 2021; however, an important caveat to consider before generalising the results to the broader South Australian context is the relatively small sample of VIOs (e.g., only 27 responded to some questions concerning COVID). The following sections summarise VIOs responses to questions about their experiences of difficulties arising from COVID-19 and areas where VIOs believed they would benefit from additional support.

Of 32 VIOs who responded to the question “To what extent are your volunteer programs currently operational” most (n= 25, 78%) were fully operational, with 5 (16%) partially operational and 2 (6%) not currently operational. Although our VIO sample was not large enough to comprehensively represent the sector, it could be assumed based on these results that by June/July 2021 most VIOs were operational to an extent at or approaching pre-COVID levels. In response to the question “To what extent has your organisation needed to redesign or adapt volunteer roles or programs due to COVID-19” the most common response in the VIO sample was “somewhat” (n = 14, 48%) followed by “very much/entirely” (n = 9, 31%) and “not at all” (n = 6, 21%).

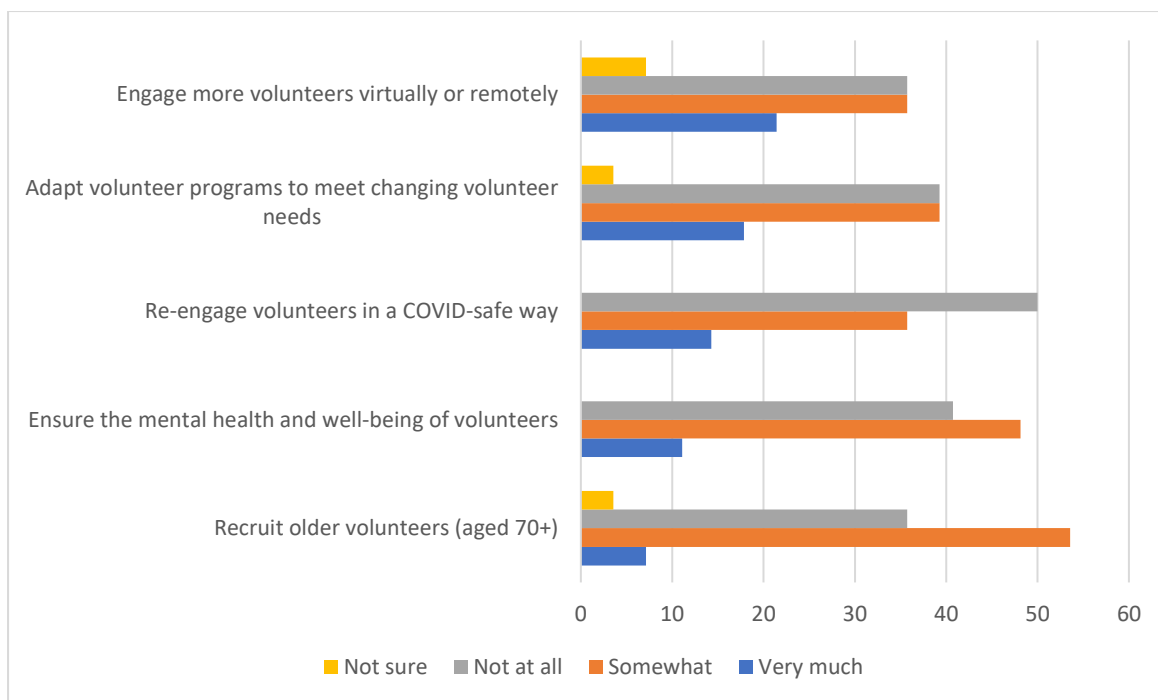
We gained additional insights into VIO’s experiences of and responses to COVID-19 through a series of questions based on Volunteering Australia’s Re-engaging Volunteers and COVID-19 report (2021b) that asked about the level of difficulty faced by VIOs in addressing COVID-19 related challenges. Results are summarised in Figure 5 which shows the proportion of VIOs endorsing difficulty (very difficult/difficult), easy (extremely easy/easy) or a neutral response (neither easy nor difficult) to each potential problem.



**Figure 5. VIO’s perceived difficulty of COVID-19 related challenges (n = 28)**

For most of the potential problems, the neutral response (neither easy nor difficult) was most endorsed, suggesting that these issues were of some concern to most of the VIOs surveyed, but did not present major ongoing challenges. The exception was “re-engage or recruit volunteers to desired levels” which was identified as difficult or very difficult by almost half (46%) of the VIOs who responded. The next most frequently endorsed difficulty was around ensuring organisational stability and adequate funding (39%).

Finally, additional questions based on the Re-engaging Volunteers and COVID-19 report (Volunteering Australia, 2021b) concerned the extent to which VIOs perceived they needed support to better meet COVID-related and other challenges. Results pertaining to these questions are shown in Figure 6. The findings did not point to a specific area of need, but rather suggested that VIOs perceived potential value in being able to access additional support across various aspects of the sector, with 35% or more of VIOs indicating either ‘somewhat’ or very much’ for their extent of need across each area of support. Most pertinent to this report, over 60% of VIOs indicated either ‘somewhat’ (53.6%) or ‘very much’ (7.1%) need of support in the recruitment of older volunteers.



**Figure 6. VIO's support needs in meeting COVID-19 and other challenges (ns 27 – 28)**

### 4.3 Aim 3. Non-Volunteers and VIOs Perceptions of Barriers and Facilitators to Volunteering

Overall, we found that non-volunteers perceived issues around flexibility of volunteering opportunities as most important in potentially influencing a decision to volunteer. Responses from VIOs were largely consistent with this theme, with people being too busy, and the need for greater flexibility timewise commonly identified as barriers. These findings are important as they indicate that flexibility in volunteering opportunities is likely to be of central importance to VIOs in tailoring their programs in ways that can attract new volunteers. The sections that follow provide a detailed breakdown of facilitating factors identified by non-volunteers, as well as barriers and facilitators endorsed by VIOs.

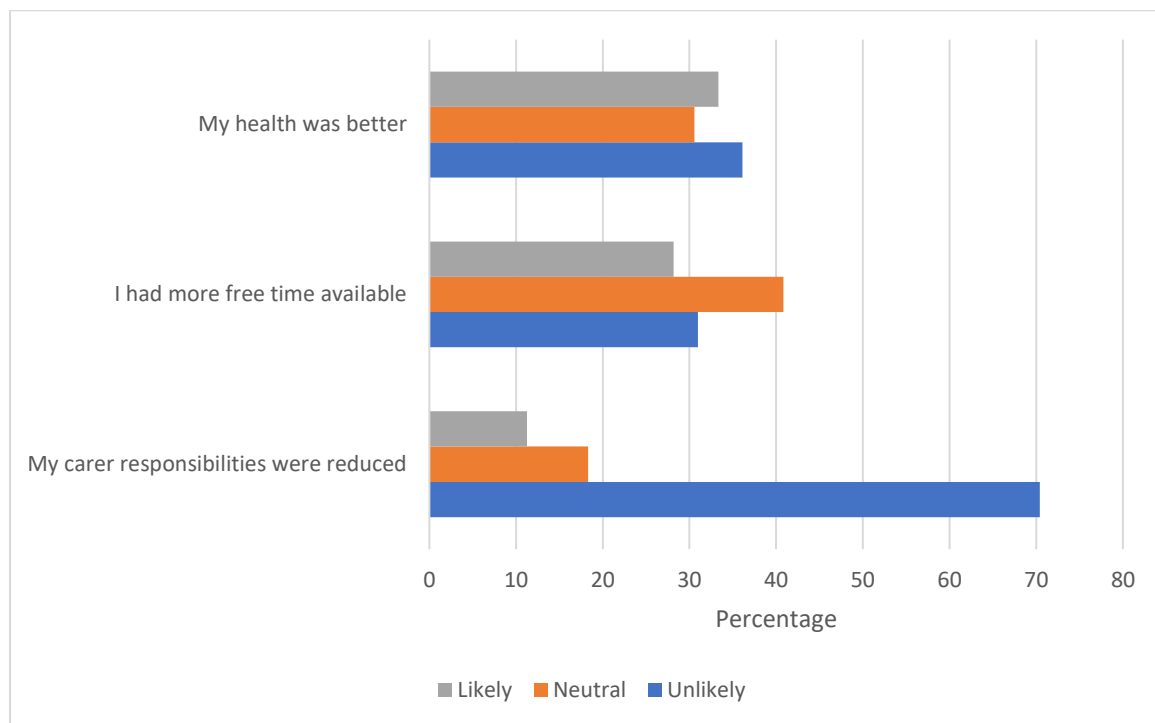
#### 4.3.1 Perceptions of Non-Volunteers

Among the 75 non-volunteers in our sample, only a small proportion reported having stopped volunteering in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, with 12 (16%) reporting that they had temporarily ceased volunteering, and 3 (4%) indicated they had permanently ceased volunteering due to COVID-19. Among the remaining non-volunteers, 41 (55%) had volunteered in the past and discontinued for reasons other than COVID 19, and 19 (25%) had never volunteered. To gain insight into the issues that might affect older adults' decisions to volunteer, we asked non-volunteers to rate the likelihood that 48 factors (based on barriers and facilitators identified by Haski-Leventhal et al., 2018 and Warburton et al., 2007) would affect their decision to start volunteering within the next 12 months. Responses were provided on 5-point scales ranging from 1 = Very unlikely to 5 = Very likely and were collapsed into "Unlikely" (1-2), "Neutral" (3) and "Likely" (4-5) for presentation in the Figures below.

For ease of presentation, potential barriers and facilitators were grouped into themes labelled (1) Personal circumstances, (2) Administration and training, (3) Convenience and safety, (4) Diversity and acceptance, (5) Growth and Well-being, (6) Social networks and

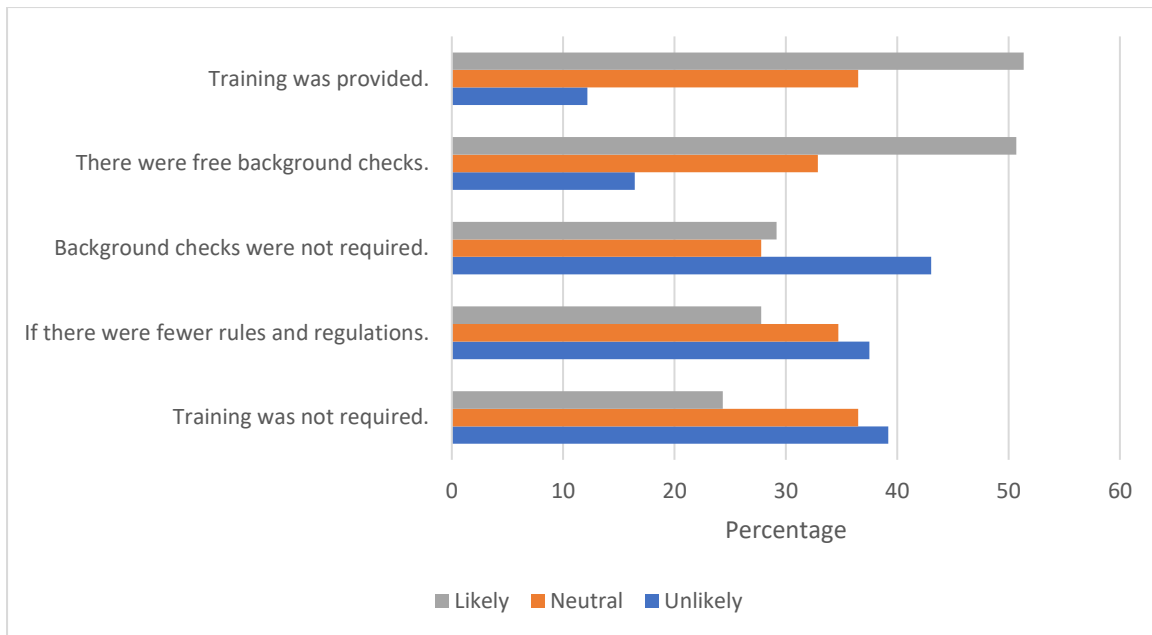
social status, (7) Tailored opportunities, (8) Work and finance, and (9) Flexibility of volunteering.

We can gain a sense of the extent to which decisions not to volunteer among our sample of non-volunteers were driven by personal circumstances by considering Figure 7. Here we can see that around one-third of the sample indicated that they might volunteer if their health was better. A smaller proportion (11%) cited caregiving responsibilities as a factor, whereas 28% indicated that a lack of free time would influence their decisions around volunteering. Overall, these data suggest that while volunteering may not be seen as a viable option for a proportion of our non-volunteers given health problems or time constraints, a number of non-volunteers likely had sufficient resources to volunteer should they desire to, and should the appropriate opportunity or opportunities present themselves.



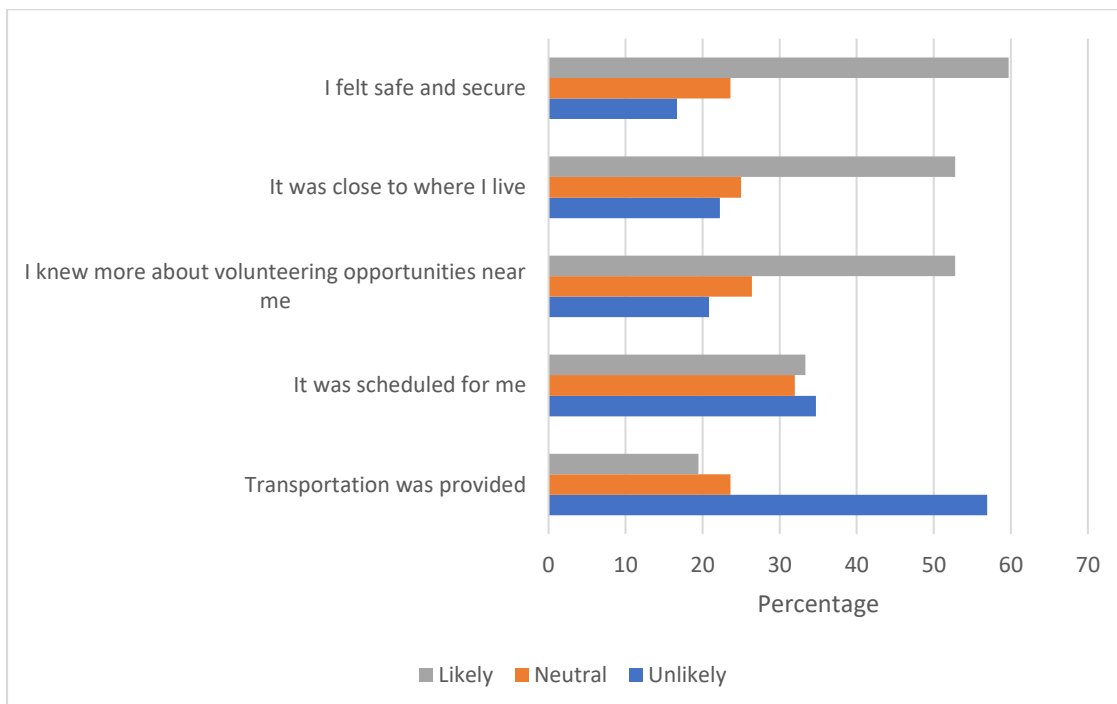
**Figure 6. Factors influencing a decision to start volunteering – Personal circumstances (ns 71-72)**

Figure 7 shows the proportion of non-volunteers who indicated that issues around administrative requirements and training would be likely to influence a decision around volunteering.



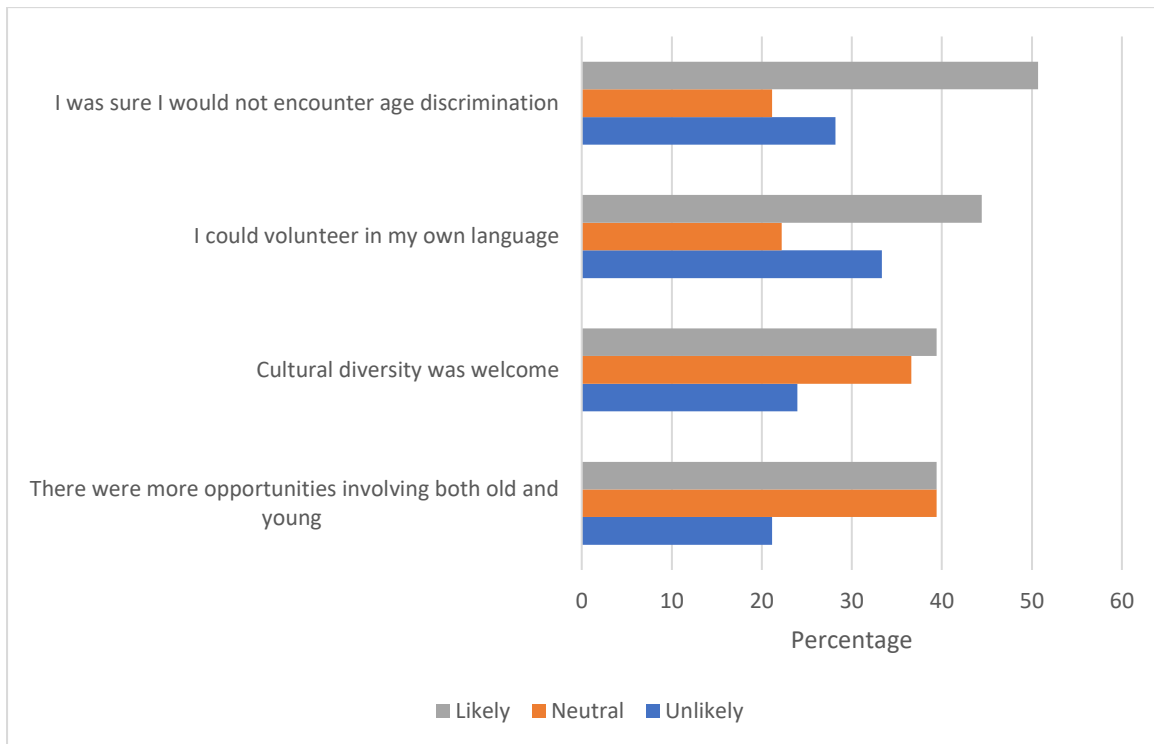
**Figure 7. Factors influencing a decision to start volunteering – administration and training (ns 72 – 74)**

A minority of participants (<30%) indicated that fewer rules and regulations, or the absence of a need for background check requirements would influence their decision. In contrast, around half of participants indicated that the provision of training and background checks being free would influence their decision. Several factors combined under the theme of convenience and safety (Figure 8) were relevant to volunteering decisions. Most frequently endorsed were the availability of opportunities close to home, feeling safe and secure, and greater knowledge of local volunteering opportunities. Having transport provided and personalised scheduling were relatively less frequently endorsed.

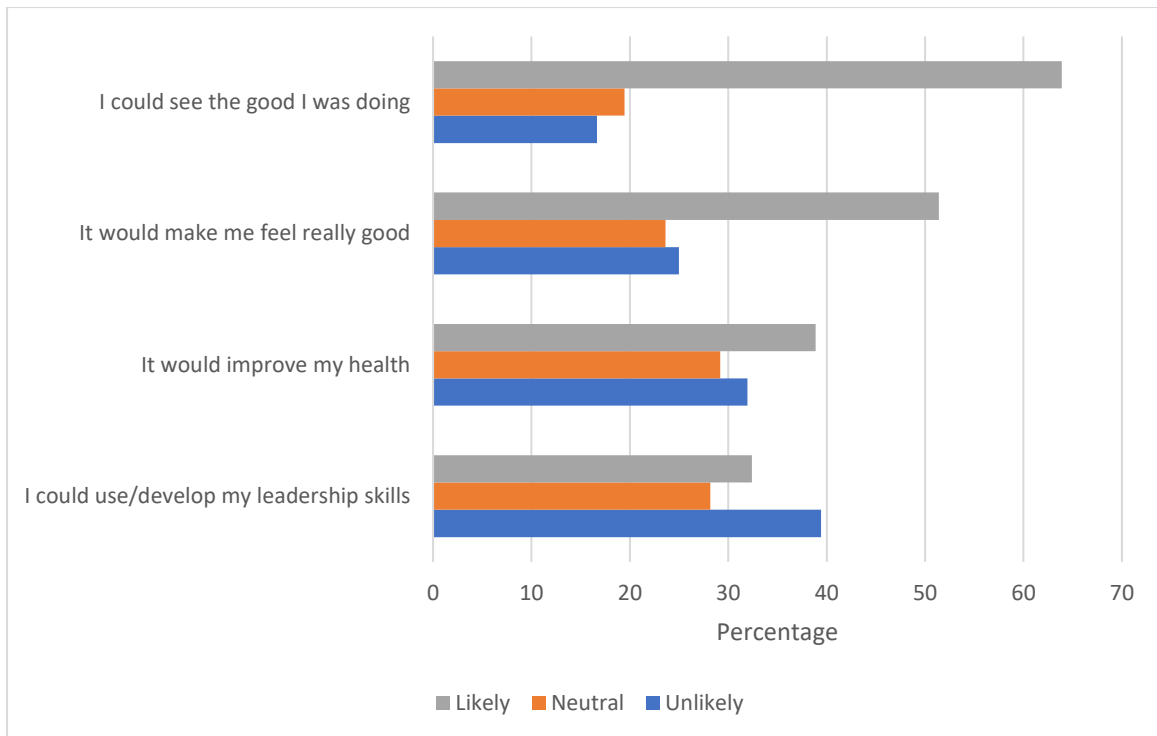


**Figure 8. Factors influencing a decision to start volunteering – convenience and safety (n = 72)**

Among issues of diversity and acceptance (Figure 9), each factor was endorsed to a moderate degree (around 30% to 50% falling into the “Likely” category) with the highest endorsement around the certainty that age discrimination would not be encountered (50.70%). It is important to recognise our predominantly Caucasian sample in interpreting these findings- acceptance and diversity may well be more important factors for older adults from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. For the growth and wellbeing factors (Figure 10) doing good for others and feeling good oneself were relatively more highly endorsed, whereas the opportunity to use and develop leadership skills and improve health were more moderately endorsed.



**Figure 9. Factors influencing a decision to start volunteering – diversity and acceptance (ns 71 - 72)**



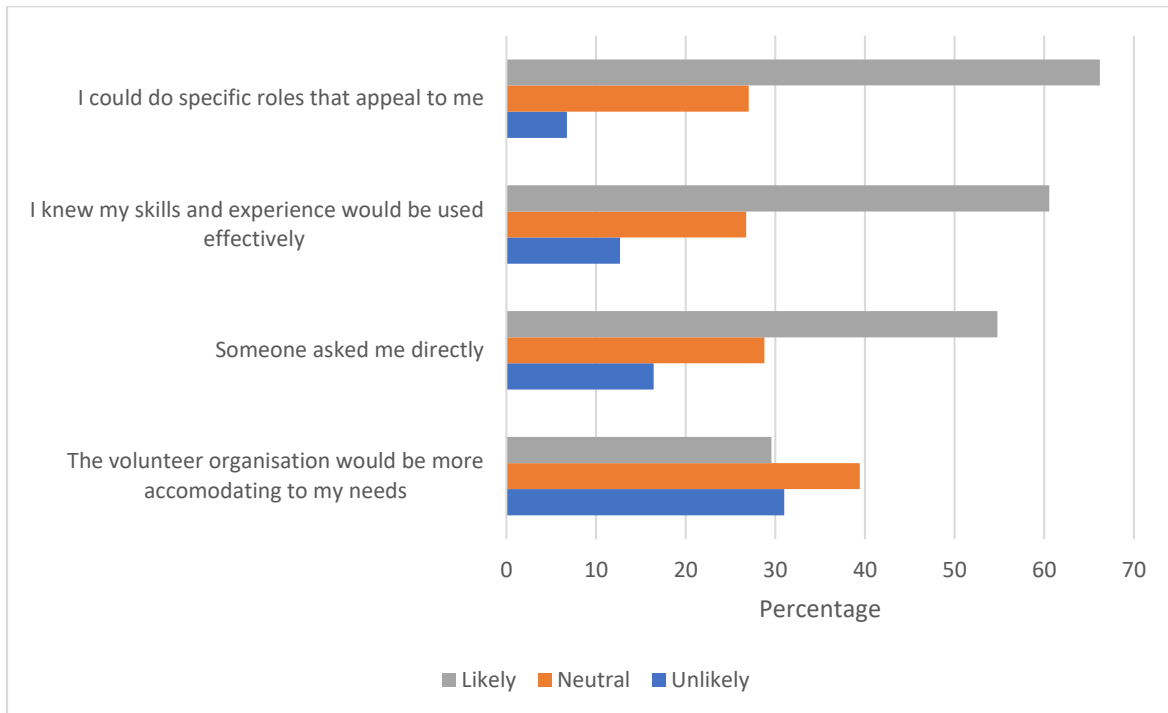
**Figure 10. Factors influencing a decision to start volunteering – growth and well-being (ns 71-72)**

In terms of social network opportunities and social status attached to volunteering (Figure 11), endorsement was at low to moderate levels (<30%) for each factor with the exception that over 50% of respondents indicated that their decision would be likely to be influenced by the volunteering cause or organisation being well-known.



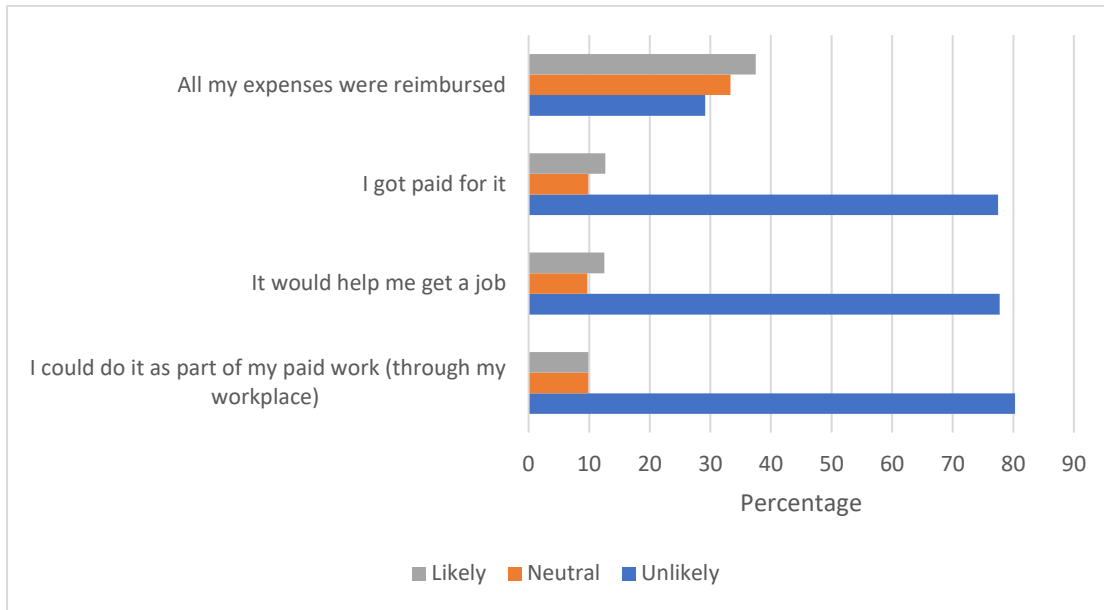
**Figure 11. Factors influencing a decision to start volunteering – social networks and social status (ns 71 – 72)**

Factors classified under the theme of tailored opportunities for volunteering generally received higher endorsement (Figure 12) with 50% to 60% of respondents indicating that their decision would be influenced by the knowledge that their skills would be used effectively, that they could perform roles that appealed to them and the prospect of being directly asked by someone to volunteer. In general, factors related to work and finance (Figure 13) were not strongly endorsed, with only the prospect of having expenses reimbursed scoring in the moderate range of “Likely” responses (38%).



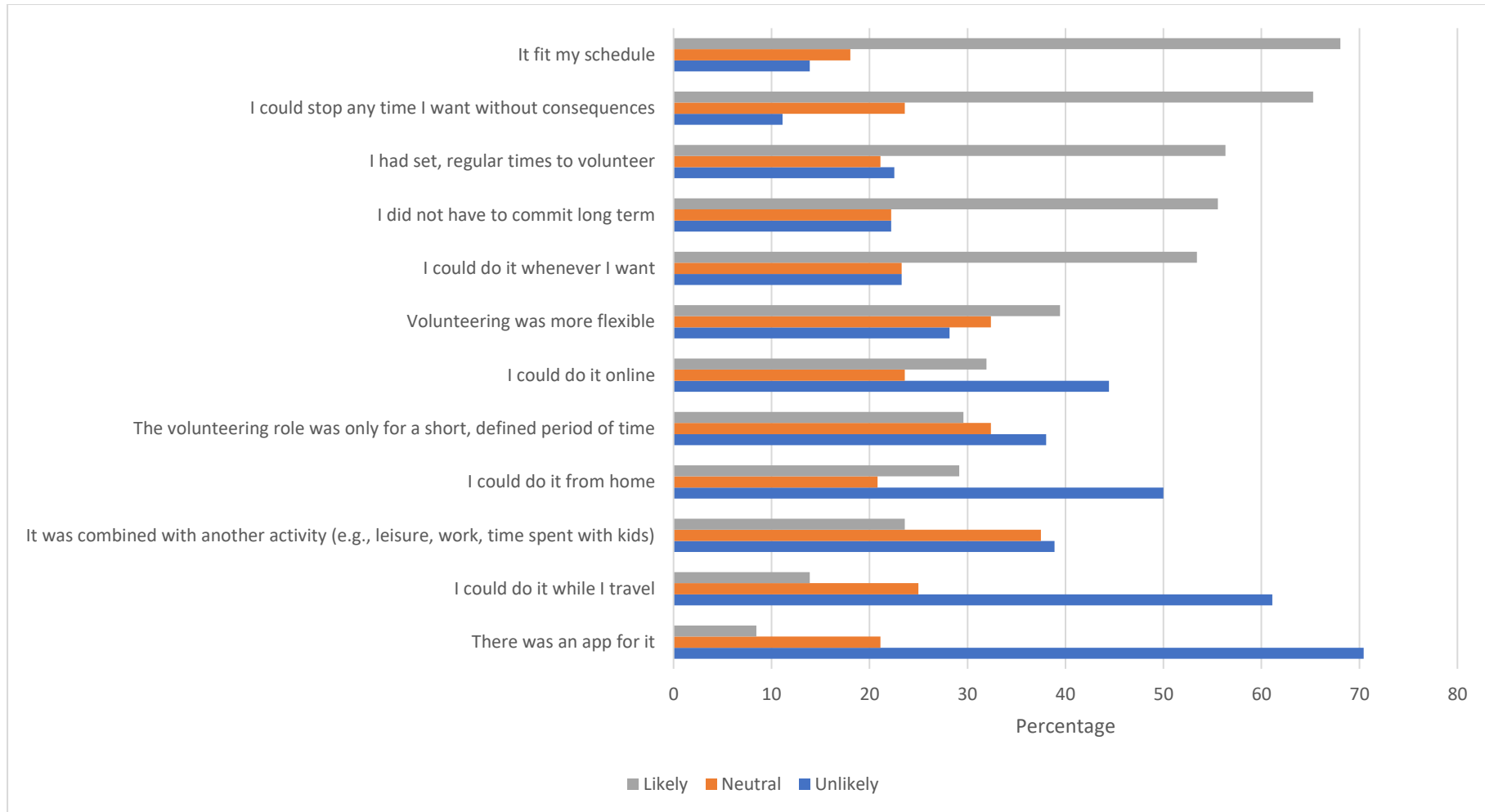
**Figure 12. Factors influencing a decision to start volunteering – tailored opportunities (ns 71 – 74)**





**Figure 13. Likelihood of influencing a decision to start volunteering – work and finance (ns 71-72)**

Finally, Figure 14 shows endorsement of factors captured under the theme of flexibility of volunteering. Most notably, over half of participants indicated that volunteering decisions would be likely to be influenced by having set regular times to volunteer, having volunteer options that fitted with their schedule, being able to stop volunteering any time, no requirement to commit long term, and the flexibility to volunteer when they wanted.



**Figure 14. Likelihood of influencing a decision to start volunteering – flexibility of volunteering (ns 71 - 73)**

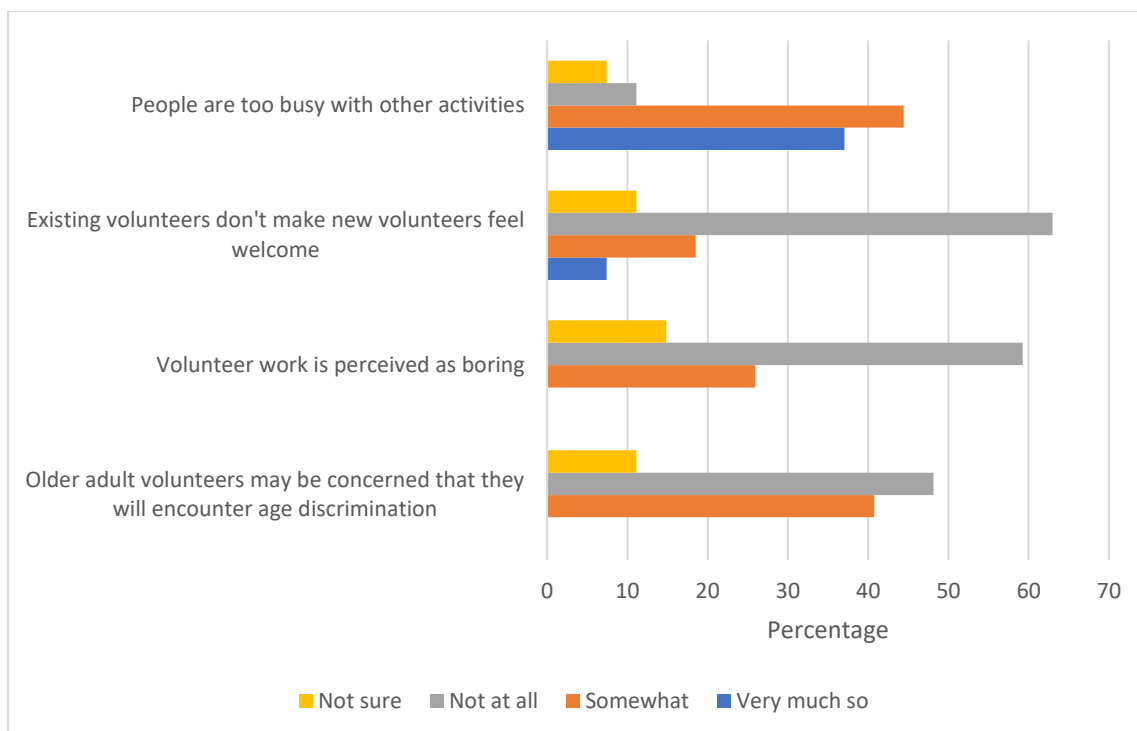
To summarise the main barriers and facilitators endorsed by non-volunteers, we identified just those factors rated as 'likely' or 'very likely' to influence a decision about volunteering by 50% or more of respondents. These factors are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3. Factors endorsed by 50% or more of non-volunteers as likely to influence a decision about volunteering in the next 12 months**

Factor	% Likely/Very likely
Fit my schedule	68.1
I could do specific roles that appeal to me	66.2
Could stop at any time without consequences	65.3
Could see the good I was doing	63.9
Skills and experience used effectively	60.6
Felt safe and secure	59.7
Set, regular times to volunteer	56.3
Did not have to commit long term	55.6
Someone asked me directly	54.8
It was a well-known organisation/cause	54.2
Could do it whenever I want	53.4
Knowledge of opportunities near me	52.8
Training provided	52.4
Would make me feel really good	51.4
Sure I would not encounter age discrimination	50.7
Free background checks	50.7

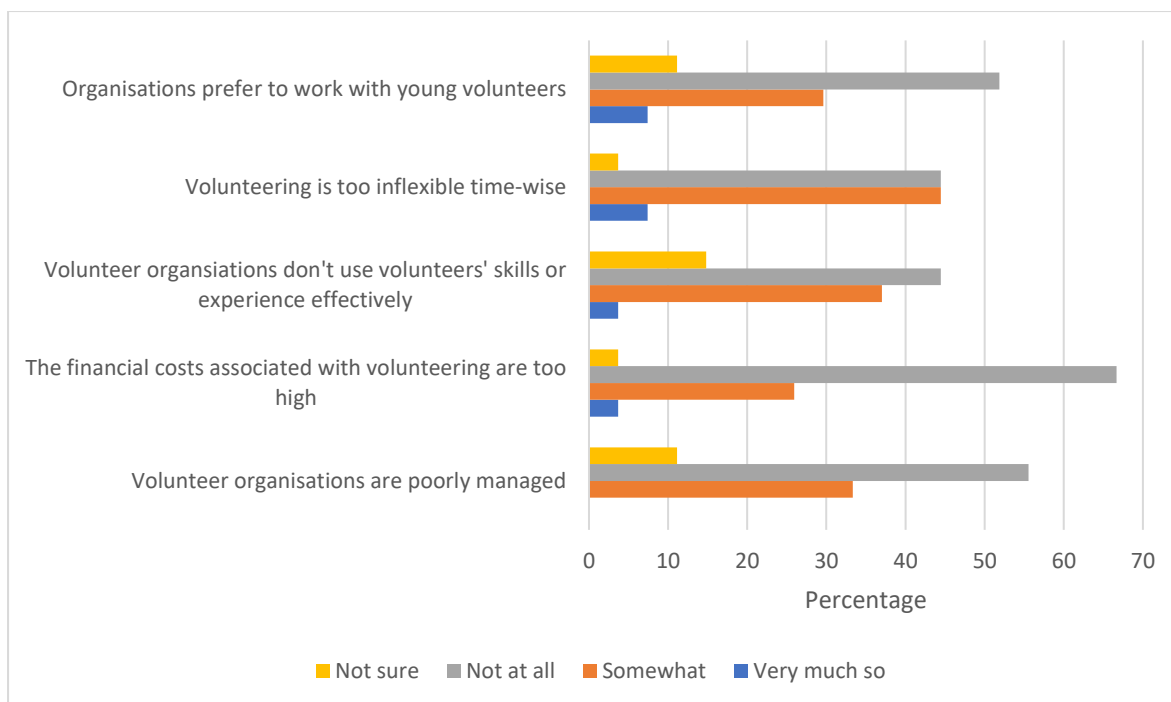
#### **4.3.2 Barriers and Facilitators: Perceptions of VIOs**

Additional insight into issues that might prevent volunteering among older adults was gained by asking VIOs to rate the extent to which they saw a series of factors adapted from Warburton et al. (2007) as potential barriers (1 = very much so; 2 = somewhat; 3 = not at all; 4 = not sure) to older volunteers in South Australia. Figure 15 shows VIO's ratings in relation to barriers associated with characteristics of older adults or volunteers. People being too busy doing other activities to volunteer was most endorsed as a barrier (over 80% responded 'very much' or 'somewhat'), and 41% indicate that concerns regarding age discrimination were 'somewhat' of a barrier. Most VIOs (around 60%) did not regard concerns about volunteering being boring, or existing volunteers being unwelcoming as barriers.



**Figure 15. VIOs perceptions of barriers to older volunteers – characteristics of older adults and volunteers (n = 27)**

Regarding barriers associated with volunteering organisations or the broader sector (Figure 16), 52% of VIOs recognised a lack of flexibility in timing of volunteering to be ‘very much’ or ‘somewhat’ of a barrier. Among the other factors, a substantial minority (around 30% to 40%) recognised poor management, failure to utilise older adults’ skills and a preference among organisations to work with younger people as possible barriers. Two-thirds of VIOs indicated that costs around volunteering were “not at all” barrier.



**Figure 16. VIOs perceptions of barriers to older volunteers – characteristics of organisations and the sector ( $n = 27$ )**

VIOs were also asked to rate the extent to which various possible facilitating factors (adapted from Warburton et al., 2007) might play a role in encouraging older South Australians to volunteer. Results are shown in Figure 17. All the listed facilitators were recognised as having potential value, with the range of factors from greater flexibility of options to skills-based programs targeted at older adults to directly targeting older adults through appeals endorsed with 'somewhat' or 'very much' ratings by 60% or more of VIOs. The highest combined somewhat/very much ratings (>80% of VIOs) were provided for:

- Programs designed around the needs of older volunteers (85%)
- Create more opportunities involving both old and young (85%)
- Collaborative recruitment among peak volunteer organisations (85%)
- Inclusive organisational cultures that welcome diversity (81%)
- Business engaging in proactive strategies prior to retirement (81%)

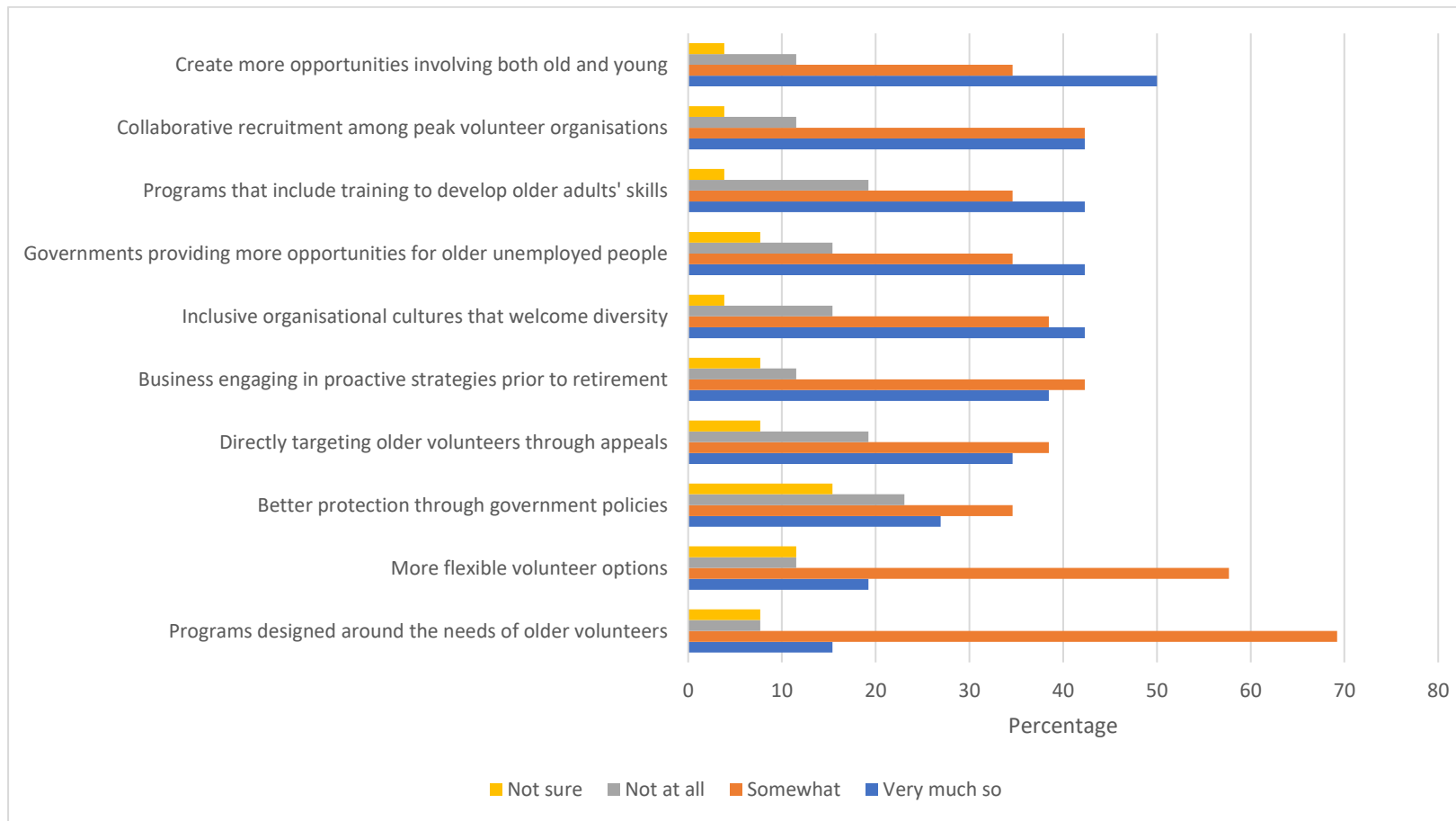


Figure 17. VIOs perceptions of how useful possible facilitators would be in encouraging volunteering among older South Australians ( $n = 26$ )

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## 4.4 Qualitative Interviews with VIO Representatives

To provide contextual information with richer detail outlining perspectives of VIOs related to older volunteers, we interviewed 6 VIO representatives, focusing on (a) what they see as important issues related to attracting and supporting older adult volunteers in South Australia, (b) aspects of the system that could be improved, and (c) awareness of initiatives developed to recruit and support older adult volunteers in South Australia, and their impressions of those initiatives. Below, we first outline common themes that emerged from the interviews, before focusing on more specific relevant points made by individual interviewees. Overall, the following key themes were revealed through the interviews:

- COVID-19 has had a significant impact on the engagement of older volunteers
- Providing flexible volunteering opportunities that match older adults' skills and interests is of primary importance for recruitment and retention
- Effectively managing risk and administrative requirements presents an ongoing challenge for VIOs and older volunteers
- Recruitment of older volunteers is likely to be supported by better, more strategic approaches to marketing and communication around volunteering opportunities that emphasise the benefits to volunteers

### 4.4.1 COVID-19

In terms of current challenges to attracting and recruiting older volunteers, four out of the six interviewees referred directly to disruption associated with COVID-19. For example, one VIO representative reported noticing a “huge change” due to COVID, and another noted that all their older volunteers were stepped down during the initial COVID lockdown and that many had health concerns that they felt might put them at risk in the COVID environment. A similar point was made by another interviewee who noted that some volunteers were waiting until they could be vaccinated before returning and that the volunteering environment in their organisation had been complicated by changing government directives related to facility closures and lockdowns. Another interviewee reported that:

*[VIO1] There is so much bad publicity re how aged care facilities and how they've handled COVID, particularly in the eastern states. It's better in SA, but older people are more at risk if they get covid, so they're a lot more cautious re being involved.*

On a more encouraging note, [VIO1] also made the point that:

*There's also been a group of older volunteers who have been more supportive: realising that many people are not getting the regular contact they'd normally have with family/friends because of COVID, so are stepping up to provide support.*

Notably, the interview findings align with the results of the VIO survey reported above, where the most endorsed difficulty associated with COVID-19 concerned the re-engagement or recruitment of volunteers.

### 4.4.2 Flexibility of Volunteering Opportunities

Another theme that emerged from the interviews was the importance of providing flexible opportunities for volunteering that aligns with the skills, interests, and capacities of older adults. Three interviewees noted that many older adults have substantial demands on their time (e.g.,

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family obligations appointments and other activities), highlighting the need for volunteering opportunities to be flexible and to align with older adults' existing lifestyles and commitments. As one interviewee put it:

[VIO2] *A lot of older people already have things they are doing, and there needs to be more promotion that talks about volunteering in terms of flexibility so that it's clear that it's not like their job, and they're not restricted to specific times, or certain types of work. There are all sorts of opportunities out there that can fit in with their lifestyle. When we have a face-to-face discussion, we can explain it. But we're not so good at communicating the types of opportunities that don't fit the normal mould.*

The recognition of flexibility also aligns with the results reported above from our survey of older non-volunteers, where the most endorsed factor likely to influence a future decision about volunteering was that it "fit my schedule".

Consistent with notions of flexible approaches, two of the interviewees emphasised the importance of providing volunteering opportunities for older adults that match their skills and interests. One interviewee specified:

[VIO3] *Ensuring that the programs or roles that they're in accommodate any needs that they may have (e.g. physical limitations), so that it's something that they can achieve physically, and with emotional confidence.*

and

*Ensuring that the role they are given really suits their interests, and that they feel supported in that role, and that the demands of the role are not overwhelming.*

One of the interviewees reflected on the important but sometimes challenging role of managing older volunteers' expectations as a key part of the process of aligning skills and interests. Managing expectations can be relevant when highly qualified volunteers perceive that their skills are being under-utilised. At the same time, organisational requirements can mean that volunteers can sometimes desire more responsibility from their roles than an organisation is able to accommodate. On the other side of the coin, expectation management can also come into play when deteriorating health or functional capacities of older volunteers necessitate a change in responsibilities. According to [VIO4]:

*When someone's been a volunteer for a long time and they start to need services or start making a lot of mistakes, we try to support them through that transition in a way that's respectful. That can be really tricky for the organisation and the individual, because we want them to retain a sense of purpose but need to balance that with the needs of the organisation as well.*

#### **4.4.3 Risk Management and Regulatory Requirements**

Three of the VIO interviewees provided specific examples of areas where risk management, regulations and administrative requirements have created challenges for VIOs and older volunteers. Significant administrative requirements can be off-putting for some who only want to volunteer at a modest level, and certain volunteer roles (e.g., being a driver) have significant associated checks, assessments, and paperwork. One VIO interviewee noted they were unable to ensure older volunteers over the age of 85, who are required to take on the risk themselves. Another noted that significant delays with processes such as police checks can cause frustration and dissipate enthusiasm among volunteers. Two of the VIOs mentioned the recent requirement



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for first aid qualifications for community volunteers as a potential barrier, particularly for older volunteers who are less physically robust. [VIO4] explains:

*The recent government decision about volunteers in direct care roles (including drivers) needing to complete a first aid certificate has caused a lot of problems. We had a lot of volunteers who were unable to meet CPR competency requirements because of their own issues, and it was really uncomfortable for all of us.*

#### 4.4.4 Marketing and Communication

The need for more effective marketing of volunteering opportunities and more effective dissemination of information about volunteering was mentioned by three VIO interviewees. One interviewee [VIO5] suggested:

*Better marketing is needed: Some people hear about volunteering through word of mouth, they've heard about us and want to get involved. They're the minority of people who want to give back to the community or do something so that they're not on their own or depressed at home. But it is hard to attract that group without marketing or being out there in the community and promoting it. We have membership with Volunteering SA/Northern Territory, which is where a lot of my volunteers come from. But at the moment I am going to Expos and promoting the fact that I need volunteers.*

[VIO3] highlighted the potential benefits of more strategic, coordinated approaches to promotion and marketing:

*Strategic promotion for the broader community volunteer roles would be good, in terms of referring volunteers to different organisations or fields that they may be better suited to if they're not suitable to volunteer in a role that we have. It would be good if some of the broader community-based or business-based or sporting organisations considered older volunteers. There's a bit of a gap in broader marketing about the benefits of older volunteers.*

Effective communication, dissemination of information and promotion of volunteering opportunities in the community appear to represent one way of enhancing greater engagement with older volunteers. However, once engaged with volunteer roles or organisations, issues of effective communication can still present barriers. Specifically, two of the VIO interviewees raised the issue of how increasingly exclusively online methods of communication prove challenging for many older volunteers. As [VIO2] put it:

*The increasingly online aspect of services and information really is a massive barrier to people who have done things differently throughout their lives. They're used to doing things face to face, by building relationships with people. Telling people that they have to go online is not helping them. We're finding that many people just aren't getting information. We then refer them to a community organisation that can teach them how to use a computer if that's a barrier, but it just becomes too hard for them.*

#### 4.4.5 Recognising and promoting the benefits of volunteering

Four of the participating VIO representatives pointed to the benefits of volunteering. According to [VIO3]:

*Volunteering is good for people. [the organisation] really encourage older people to become volunteers as long as they're engaged in and enjoy the work, and have the capacity with us supporting them. We know the outcomes are so positive for peoples' health and wellbeing and staying connected that we promote it as much as we can and we welcome anyone of any age who wants to volunteer.*

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One of the other interviewees [VIO5] suggested that educating people on the value of volunteering could support the endeavours of VIOs. Specifically:

*I think that there should be education on how valuable it is when you are part of the workforce, to be treated like anybody else whether you're paid or not, and respected. Organisations need to look after and mentor these people, and that's when you get the good results and longevity.*

Finally, two of the respondents noted that an important part of the process of supporting older volunteers was helping them to feel valued and supporting their confidence in recognising that they can contribute.

#### **4.4.6 Initiatives for recruiting and supporting older volunteers**

Three interviewees referred to programs targeted at recruiting older volunteers. Two referred to Southern Volunteering's recently completed VIBE project. The now defunct "Golden Gurus" mentoring initiative was mentioned by one interviewee, and two interviewees commented on the proactive role played by COTA [www.cota.org.au](http://www.cota.org.au) in promoting opportunities for volunteering among older adults through their communications.

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## 5. CONCLUSIONS

This section provides the summary of the research findings.

### 5.1 Summary of Key Findings

- Older adults who continued to volunteer during COVID-19 found volunteering highly satisfying, were very satisfied with the VIOs they volunteered with, and experienced a strong alignment between their goals and the volunteering opportunities available to them.
- A substantial minority of VIOs faced difficulties associated with COVID-19, especially about re-engaging or recruiting volunteers.
- Flexibility of volunteering opportunities (e.g., fitting with schedule, roles that appealed, being able to stop at any time) is the most recognised factor that would be likely to encourage current non-volunteers to volunteer. Other important ones include feeling safe and secure, being asked directly to volunteer, being part of a well-known organisation, having training provided, feeling good because of volunteering, free background checks, and being sure that age discrimination would not be encountered.
- The most critical current issues according to VIOs are (1) the disruption resulting from COVID-19, (2) the importance of providing flexible opportunities for older volunteers that match their skills and abilities, (3) challenges around managing administrative and regulatory requirements, and (4) the need for more effective marketing and communication, including promoting the benefits to prospective volunteers.

#### 5.1.1 Aim 1. Documenting the Experiences of Older South Australian Volunteers

Our survey of South Australian volunteers aged 70 and older revealed a group primarily motivated by the desire to contribute and help others, to enhance feelings of self-worth, to continue to learn and grow, and to foster social connections. These motivating factors align with mechanisms suggested to promote well-being among volunteers (Anderson et al., 2014; Morrow-Howell, 2010). Importantly, with only a few exceptions, the older volunteers reported a high degree of concordance between their goals for volunteering and their opportunities to fulfil those goals through their volunteering roles. Considering these findings together, it is therefore not surprising that almost all older volunteer respondents reported being satisfied or very satisfied with their current volunteer role. Moreover, most (around 80%) endorsed supportive attributes of the organisation that they volunteered with.

The very positive picture of the volunteering experience of older South Australians reflected in our data should be interpreted in the context of several limitations around sample selectivity. First, if older adults seek out volunteering opportunities but are dissatisfied, discouraged, or do not find the right 'fit' they may well be unlikely to persist in that role. Our survey did not pick up on such a group of former volunteers, and therefore our sample should be regarded as positively selected. The fact that our sample of volunteers remained engaged through COVID (despite VIOs reporting difficulties in recruitment and retention because of the pandemic) also suggests that this was a resilient group of older volunteers. Accessing the views of those who stopped volunteering because of the pandemic and have reservations about returning would have provided a more complete picture; however, this was beyond the scope of this report.

Another factor likely contributing to sample selectivity was the online administration of the questionnaire. As noted by several of our VIO interviewees, some older adults may struggle with engaging with the online world. It follows that where online engagement forms part of the volunteering role, this could create frustrations and undermine satisfaction. Older adults in such circumstances are unlikely to have contributed to the survey, which may have also biased our data

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toward more favourable responses. Finally, the sample was predominantly white, therefore our findings are not directly generalisable to older volunteers from CALD backgrounds.

Notwithstanding these limitations, our findings suggest that most older South Australian volunteers who persisted in their roles through COVID are satisfied with their volunteer roles and have positive views of the VIO organisations that they are a part of.

### **5.1.2 Aim 2. Older South Australian Volunteers, VIOs and COVID-19**

Our evaluation of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on VIOs and older volunteers primarily drew on information provided by VIOs. The clearest challenges reported by VIOs concerned maintaining organisational stability and funding, and in particular re-engaging or recruiting new volunteers in the context of COVID. Issues of recruitment and retention being adversely affected by COVID are consistent with the findings of the ANU Centre for Social Research and Methods (2020) as well as comments from four of the six VIO representatives that we interviewed.

The global COVID-19 pandemic has produced a complex and changeable environment for individuals, social groups and organisations, and COVID-related challenges may be particularly felt in the volunteering sector where increases in the need for services could correspond with difficulties in retaining and recruiting an unpaid workforce. It seems likely that vaccination of a high proportion of the South Australian population will represent a crucial step in creating the climate needed by VIOs to improve recruitment, particularly among older adults who may be more vulnerable to adverse health outcomes resulting from infection. It is significant that among our non-volunteer sample, 60% identified 'feeling safe and secure' as a reason likely to influence a future decision about volunteering; thus, concerns around COVID are likely to be a key reason underlying a reluctance among many older adults to seek out volunteering opportunities.

### **5.1.3 Aim 3. Non-volunteers and VIOs Perceptions of Barriers and Facilitators to Volunteering**

One key theme that emerged when considering the responses of older non-volunteers, VIO survey respondents and VIO interviewees, was the recognition that recruiting and retaining older volunteers was dependent on opportunities being flexible, and organisations being responsive to older adults' diverse needs, commitments and capabilities. For example, the top three factors that might influence a decision about volunteering by non-volunteers were (1) opportunities that fit their schedule, (2) being able to do specific appealing roles, and (3) having the flexibility to stop at any time. VIOs also recognised that many older adults were busy with competing commitments on their time, and that this needed to be catered for to maximise opportunities for engagement.

The extent to which volunteering opportunities can be offered in flexible ways in terms of the level of commitment and diversity in available roles and responsibilities will vary across VIOs according to their core business and available resources. However, to the extent that flexible opportunities can be provided, our results suggest that this is likely to be a key factor in enhancing recruitment success- particularly if these opportunities can be marketed and communicated effectively to older adults.

An additional theme that emerged from our qualitative interviews of VIOs that were only partially captured in the survey responses concerned difficulties associated with regulatory requirements and administrative procedures that are not always well designed to cater to older adults' needs. Examples of such challenges have been outlined in previous reports, and include potential difficulties encountered by older individuals in obtaining appropriate insurance associated with volunteer work, due to age-related policy limitations (Australian Law Reform Commission, 2013); and a recently imposed requirement that all Commonwealth Home Support Programme (CHSP) volunteers in direct care roles (i.e., involving face-to-face interaction) obtain first aid certification with cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) training (Australian Government Department of Health, 2021).

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Specifically, the physical component of CPR training is likely to act as a barrier for some older people due to concerns regarding mobility, fitness, and confidence (SA Collaborative Projects & Volunteering SA/NT, 2020); an issue raised by two of our interviewees. Our survey results also showed that a majority of those not volunteering reported that training being provided and background checks being free would increase their likelihood of volunteering.

Finally, VIO interviewees pointed to the need to better market volunteering opportunities and better communicate the benefits of volunteering for physical, social and psychological well-being. Likewise, those not volunteering indicated that knowing where volunteering opportunities existed, what the commitments were and how they might fit into their schedule was important to assist them to decide about whether to volunteer or not. As outlined in the introduction of this report, several pilot projects have been initiated in SA (perhaps most notable the VIBE project) that are concerned with establishing systems that can be used to match volunteering opportunities to the skills, interests and resources (including available time) of prospective volunteers. Considering our findings as a whole, the desire for flexible volunteering options identified by non-volunteers, along with the recommendation of tailored opportunities for older adults endorsed by our VIO survey respondents, and the need for more effective communication of volunteering opportunities identified by several VIO interviewees, points to the value in continuing to pursue opportunities to establish ongoing coordinated systems for recording volunteering opportunities that also include functions for matching opportunities to volunteers.

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## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the finding of this research, we offer four key recommendations:

1. Establish a working group including VIOs and volunteers to examine the feasibility of a coordinated central system for recording and communicating volunteering opportunities (e.g., a codesigned central electronic repository). Ideally, this system:
  - a. could be maintained in real-time
  - b. would include a matching function that allows the skills and interests of the volunteers to be matched with volunteering opportunities, and
  - c. would facilitate 'offline' communication of volunteering opportunities to those without online access.
2. Develop workshops and/or a toolkit for organisations considering volunteer recruitment about identifying and defining flexible roles, and for existing VIOs about redefining roles in ways that promote additional flexible opportunities for older volunteers.
3. Establish a working group including volunteers, VIOs, and regulators to inform and develop pathways in volunteering that:
  - a. Ensure necessary regulations and requirements are both effectively streamlined and appropriately applied across different volunteering contexts.
  - b. Provide training that support flexibility in volunteering across VIOs and meets regulatory requirements.
  - c. Provide appropriate and standardised training for older volunteers facing difficulty with IT and accessing information online
4. Use targeted qualitative research approaches to gain a better understanding of the experiences of diverse older volunteer groups including (a) those who have currently paused volunteering as a result of COVID-19 and may be concerned about re-engaging, and (b) older people from CALD and other diverse backgrounds.

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