

# Curriculum of giving-student volunteering workshop

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Summary report

## Contact

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# Curriculum of giving – student volunteering workshop 2019

## Introduction

On Thursday 30 May 2019, 110 delegates from public, independent and Catholic education sectors, volunteering and not-for-profit organisations, business, local government, and state government agencies attended the Curriculum of Giving – student volunteering workshop at the Education Development Centre, Hindmarsh, South Australia.

The workshop was a follow-up from the success of the inaugural workshop in 2018. Both workshops were facilitated in partnership with the Government of SA (Department for Education and Department of Human Services), the Volunteering Strategy for SA 2014-2020, and Volunteering SA&NT.

At the 2019 workshop, participants heard from experts across Australia in the fields of student volunteering, service learning, curriculum, wellbeing, social justice and values education. They also heard about the neuroscience and significant positive effects on the brain and body when engaging in volunteering. They learnt practical strategies to encourage student learning and improve wellbeing and explored new resources to support the application of student volunteering programs in schools.

The workshop also provided an avenue for delegates to develop relationships, networks and partnerships between schools and volunteer organisations to foster opportunities for students to embrace a culture of giving.

## Participants

While the first workshop in 2018 was targeted primarily to school educators who were already champions of student volunteering, the 2019 workshop participants were equally from the education and volunteer sectors, all keen to provide opportunities for school aged children to be involved in volunteering.

- Education sector: 45 (41%) (Teachers, principals, presidents of associations, channel managers, student wellbeing leaders, workplace learning, Flexible Learning Options and corporate office staff)
- School student volunteers: 10 (9%)
- Volunteer involving organisations: 40 (36%)
- Local government and business: 11 (10%)
- Other state government agencies: 4 (3%)

## Speakers

### MC's

Evelyn O'Loughlin, Chief Executive Officer, Volunteering SA&NT

Katerina Eleutheriou, Director, Engagement and Wellbeing directorate, Early Years and Child Development, Department for Education

### Opening address

Hon Michelle Lensink MLC, Minister for Human Services

### Closing address

Hon John Gardner MP, Minister for Education

## Keynote speakers

**Dr Thomas Nielsen**, Associate Professor, Faculty of Education, University of Canberra

### **The Giving Curriculum - the missing link in an education for a sustainable future.**

Dr Nielsen's thought provoking keynote posed the questions:

- Why is it that the world has doubled its spending power since the end of the Second World War, but also seen a significant rise in suicide and depression rates in the same period?
- Why is it that countries can raise their PISA scores, but also remain at the top of the lists of countries with the highest rates of mental ill-health?

Through his research, Dr Nielsen shared with delegates the science behind the giving curriculum and why it is so important to embed this in our education systems. Giving to others, is one of the best predictors of increasing not only communal and individual wellbeing in the classroom, but also academic diligence and success. Research shows that giving is a strong predictor of increased mental and physical health into adulthood and reduced adolescent depression and suicide risk. The giving curriculum is more than physical actions. It involves:

**Doing:** allowing children and young people to simply give in a variety of ways, as this improves meaningful living and wellbeing in and of itself

**Feeling:** stimulating children and young people's hearts through imaginative and emotionally engaging learning activities, and this reinforces children and young people's empathy and wish to give

**Thinking:** sharing the research on the meaningful vs. pleasurable life, to enable informed decisions and to live the 'examined life'

**Integration:** embedding the Giving Curriculum into existing curriculum, not as an 'add-on' but rather as a way of doing things more effectively, to improve wellbeing as well as academic outcomes.

He reinforced that wellbeing/resilient people have an array of habits, traits and qualities, but the factor that seems to impact on all these aspects is having/giving meaning in one's life. Good wellbeing/resilience, is a by-product of a giving curriculum and the meaningful life.

It is therefore important that we provide opportunities for all children and young people to give and to explore conceptually the many benefits of giving/volunteering. It is through a giving curriculum that this can occur, providing a non-ideological, neutral ground that invites us to all walk together—because there is more that unites us than separates us.

For more information about Dr Thomas Nielsen's research visit [Curriculum of Giving: Giving, education and the meaningful life](#)

**Dr Fiona Kerr**, Neuroscientist, Adelaide based founder of The NeuroTech Institute

### **How volunteering can grow a more engaged brain**

Dr Kerr's dynamic presentation showed how when children and young people volunteer it opens up a world of possibilities – with energy for new ideas, self-awareness, greater sense of fulfilment and optimism, empathy and care. It enriches learning, develops general capabilities, provides employment and entrepreneurial opportunities, and helps them to become active, healthy, and kinder citizens.

However, volunteering can also have none of these effects if the activities do not engage empathy or prime a capacity for altruism and compassion.

Under the right conditions, volunteering can grow the brain, pruning, rewiring and building, which opens up all sorts of possibilities for learning and creative thought. It improves complex thinking.

Dr Kerr spoke of her research in the areas of eye gaze and engagement, abstraction and neurogenesis, lighting up our brains, solving complex problems, lived experience and memory, connection and connectedness, amplification and contagion. She spoke about communicating, caring and connecting in a technologised world.

In closing, Dr Kerr advocated that it is through volunteering that all of the positive effects of her research can be brought to fruition for children and young people, especially the most disengaged and disadvantaged.

For more information about Dr Kerr visit [The NeuroTech Institute](#) and [The Art and Science of Looking Up](#)

**Ruth Tofler-Riesel and Robyn Monro Miller**, Founder and Director and CEO respectively of Kids Giving Back  
**Creating the next 'Generation of Generosity'**

[Kids Giving Back](#) is based in Sydney and is Australia's leading not for profit organisation for student volunteering, offering over 20,000 school-aged students a diverse range of community experiences.' Ruth and Robyn spoke about how volunteering engages the head, heart and hands of children and their families. They shared practical advice on how to create diverse volunteering experiences for school-aged students.

**Tracey Wallace**, Service Learning Coordinator, Scotch College (formerly at Ocean View College)

**Equipping student volunteer champions**

Tracey took delegates on a service-learning journey, sharing practical resources to create volunteer opportunities for students. The resulting intention is that Generation Z are inspired and motivated to make a difference through service – locally and globally.

## Breakout sessions

Following a fun speed networking session and lunch, afternoon breakout sessions provided an opportunity for delegates to hear first-hand from student volunteer champions and student ambassadors of the learning experiences gained from their involvement in volunteering.

**Building connectedness – running a student volunteer program, *secondary years focus***

Marryatville High School, Deputy Principal Julie Ferguson and one of her students shared the school's Community Challenge – a journey of giving, which involved students solving a real world and meaningful problem as social entrepreneurs and volunteers.

Ocean View College teacher Caroline Victor shared the school's original uBuntu student volunteering model, which has been successfully operating for 4 years.

St Peter's College Service Learning Coordinator Kerry Skujins and one of her students shared the approach their school is taking to support social justice issues and actions through volunteering.

**Igniting a passion for service – running a student volunteer program, *primary years focus***

Scotch College, Service Learning Coordinator Tracey Wallace, spoke about how through service learning activities students recognise the power they have as individuals in what they do and the opportunities they have to make good choices, decisions and actions to see a better world.

City of Playford, project designer Ali Elder, spoke about Playford 10, a program designed to connect students and their families in Category 1 schools to ongoing activities within the community, and to enhance their sense of belonging through building trusted and ongoing relationships. Ali and several students from Elizabeth Grove Primary School shared their recent experience of volunteering during school time at Calvary Central Districts Hospital to design and build a healing garden for the patients and staff.

### **Creating an accredited volunteering - service learning program for *disengaged and Flexible Learning Options students***

In 2018, Denis Mason, Seaton High School's Flexible Learning Options (FLO) coordinator, began planning to introduce volunteering as a compulsory program element. By creating a flexible, SACE accredited and meaningful program that incorporates Restorative Practice circles, case management, a student volunteering manual and passport, all the staff now work together to support the successful service learning unfolding while respecting and adapting it to the individual needs and interests of their diverse FLO students. Two student volunteers from the FLO program also contributed to the presentation.

### **Connecting with schools**

Matthew Taylor, City of Tea Tree Gully and Robyn Monro Miller and Ruth Tofler-Riesel, Kids Giving Back, uncovered the assumptions that may be holding volunteer organisations back from getting involved with schools. This session was well attended by volunteer involving organisations.

### **Linking volunteering to student learning and the curriculum**

Natural Resources Management Education Coordinator Steve Walker, shared with delegates how they too can plan volunteering activities that link to a whole of school focus.

### **Giving to others starts with giving to oneself - Masterclass with Dr Thomas Nielsen**

Dr Nielsen reminded delegates that to live the meaningful life—we also need to give to ourselves. In fact, if we don't give to ourselves properly, we not only find it harder to give to others, but we also don't receive the same health benefits from our giving.

## **Participant feedback**

- The culture of care and impact on wellbeing could be claimed as part of Site Improvement Plans
- Wish that there was more time to hear a bit more from each one. This would give more time to hear in more depth about different topics.
- It exceeded all of my expectations with an outstanding combination of very impressive and complimentary speakers that all prompted considerable thought and reflection.
- The links to the Volunteering Strategy were well reinforced and the outcomes in your program were clearly met.
- The involvement of both Ministers added value with both presenting their strong support and reflecting on their personal own meaningful experience in volunteering.
- It was refreshing to hear what I had worked on over twenty years ago finally enter mainstream education and get support from our department.
- Impressive that both Minister Lensink and Minister Gardner spent so much time with us and spoke of the importance of the work we are doing in this space.
- Once again, another volunteering initiative where South Australia is leading the nation.
- Beautifully balanced between theory, purpose and practice.
- Delivered beyond my expectations - head, heart and hands connections.

- SA can lead the way here. Now for implementation!
- Would like more information on linking to curriculum.

## Quotes from workshop presentations

‘Giving to others, is one of the best predictors of increasing not only communal and individual wellbeing in the classroom, but also academic diligence and success.’ Dr Thomas Nielsen, University of Canberra

‘Giving is a strong predictor of increased mental and physical health into adulthood and reduced adolescent depression and suicide risk.’ (Dillon, Wink, & Fay, 2003)

The following 2 quotes are from teachers at Elizabeth Grove Primary School, whose students (year 5 and 6) volunteered at Calvary Central Districts Hospital to build a healing garden as part of the Playford 10 program.

- ‘The behaviour of the students and the way they carried themselves both times we went to the hospital was just amazing. It was just incredible and I think that they really identified and understood that they were hopefully playing a big part to help people. They all really wanted to do that and so even with the behaviour students, none of them were any problem and they all wanted to do stuff to help which is just brilliant.’
- ‘My highlight was obviously the hospital project, because seeing the kids show so much compassion and with their heart they wanted the sick people to look out into that garden and feel better. They believed they were going to do that. I think it's a beautiful thing for the kids to have so much hope for others. Where do you have the opportunity in school to do that? That was really powerful.’

## Final word from a student volunteer

‘This was an eye-opening experience (volunteering). It reassured me of a kind and generous society, which is sometimes forgotten amidst the negative and distressing news.’ Zoe, after volunteering at Meals on Wheels as part of her school program.