# The Impact of Volunteering on a Young Person's Life

A study into the SVA Service Award - a New Zealand national framework for recognising and growing secondary school volunteering.

Independent Research Report Commissioned by the Student Volunteer Army
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# Executive Summary

The positive impact of the Student Volunteer Army's SVA Service Award on young people's lives is undeniable and profound. The research looked into the SVA Service Award, a national framework for advancing secondary school student volunteering, to provide an in-depth insight into the benefits of youth volunteering, service and mahi aroha across a range of outcome areas.

Volunteering helps students develop a variety of valuable practical skills, like communication, social and leadership skills. It enhances confidence and self-efficacy, increases work readiness and informs future career choices. It strengthens a sense of belonging at school and deepens connection with the local community. These outcomes have particular significance for students who are shy, feel isolated and who do not excel in school or sports. Volunteering also leads to a greater understanding of community needs, gaining social capital and expanding social networks. The positive association between volunteering and students' attitude-to-self is particularly poignant. Volunteering makes students feel good, proud and more connected to others, which are all positive emotional experiences that are linked to mental health and wellbeing. Volunteering also leads to increased flexibility and resilience, and studies show that resilient adolescents are more likely to develop into healthy and competent adults, despite exposure to risks. The importance of these improvements in wellbeing and attitude-to-self cannot be underestimated. This is highly relevant for adolescents, who often struggle with a lack of confidence and self-worth, but also in the New Zealand context, where mental health in our rangatahi (young people) continues to worsen.

The SVA Service Award creates visibility around youth volunteering by formally recognising service, normalising volunteering, and supporting students to become lifelong volunteers. In turn, this helps fill the volunteer sector pipeline with young people willing to contribute to causes and organisations that rely on volunteers. Not only that, but the SVA Service Award makes it accessible and fun for young people to engage in volunteering. And by doing so, the programme creates avenues through which the positive outcomes of volunteering can be experienced.

At the same time, the research shows that these outcomes may not be experienced by those who need them most, as they face higher barriers to participation. Lower decile, less-resourced schools, for instance, may not be able to offer students the support or encouragement that facilitates easy and ongoing participation in the SVA Service Award. The SVA can widen its impact by ensuring the programme is inclusive and accessible to all, by offering additional support for less advantaged schools and students. In doing so, the SVA has the potential to play an important role in levelling the playing field for disadvantaged youth in New Zealand. In addition, by making reflective practices an integral part of its volunteering programme, which highlight the wider context that leads many in our society to need support, the SVA can help young people to grow into socially aware and engaged adults. By questioning problematic volunteering concepts like the 'saviour complex,' it can create awareness of privilege and the inherent limitations of 'charity.' By educating students on participatory and indigenous approaches to volunteering, which give a voice to beneficiaries, it can help ensure that volunteering actions create the intended community benefits.

The SVA can be a force for change in New Zealand. But since it cannot be everything to everyone, it will have to make some strategic choices as to the main impact it seeks to create, and for whom.

This research offers a significant contribution to the definition and understanding of youth volunteering in both the New Zealand and global context. The findings also provide a basis for SVA's impact reporting and future strategic focus.

## About This Report

This is the public version of the research report, it has been edited and shortened for the purposes of confidentiality and public relevance. The report includes descriptions of the data collection process. In the spirit of research integrity and to create confidence in the findings, it is important to provide transparency about the steps taken to collect and review data.

It is recommended to read the full report. However, for those who have no interest in the data collection process, simply skip these sections. If time is limited, it is recommended to read the Introduction and then go straight to Chapter 4, as it gives an overview of the main conclusions of the report. For those with a bit more time, review sections 1.3.1, 2.3 and 3.3, as they paint a rich picture of the findings, and provide context to the conclusions drawn. For those interested in the academic landscape of youth volunteering, navigate to section 1.2.

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# Introduction

## About the Programme and Research

The SVA is the one of the few organisations in New Zealand with a complete focus on youth and student volunteering. The SVA Service Award is the SVA's nationwide secondary school programme operating in 250 schools throughout Aotearoa New Zealand. Since its inception in 2019, the SVA Service Award has seen incredible growth, and has had over 14 000 students involved. The programme has seen a wide spread uptake and has increased visibility and celebration of youth volunteering. This has been achieved by the unrelenting dedication of those involved with running the programme, as well as the efforts of school teachers who have been hungry for support to create service-focused cultures within their schools and communities.

While it is clear that the SVA Service Award programme has benefitted high school students and young people enjoy taking part in it, evidence of the impact of volunteering in New Zealand on young people's lives has remained largely anecdotal. Anecdotal evidence and historical research suggests that young people involved in volunteering experience improvements in areas like leadership ability, organising skills and employability, but also see an increase in confidence, attitude to self and pro-social orientation. Much of the past research has been undertaken on tertiary level, in an American context, with a strong focus on academic-based community engagement, rather than self-directed volunteering, service or mahi aroha which predominantly happens in New Zealand.

Through this research, the SVA Foundation wants to understand whether this anecdotal evidence matches the rea life experience of students engaged in the SVA Service Award programme. The overall aim of the research is to explore the impact of volunteering on a young person's life, in particular in relation to confidence, resilience, wellbeing and work-readiness. The research also aims to identify areas of improvement to better serve students' needs, especially those less likely to participate in, or progress through, the SVA Service Award programme.

The SVA intends to use the findings to ensure that the SVA Service Award programme creates better outcomes for its student community, and that involvement in the programme positions them to transition into the wider volunteer sector and advance their careers. The findings can also assist the wider volunteering community by adding to the practical and academic knowledge of youth volunteering, both nationally and globally, as this area has remained largely unexplored.

The research goes beyond anecdotal evidence (e.g. stories) and activity-based indicators (e.g. programme attendance) alone, and assesses the actual outcomes and impact experienced by secondary school students participating in the SVA Service Award.

This research was funded through a grant from the Lottery Community Sector Research and would not have been possible without significant efforts by the SVA, School Kit, our research team, our key teachers and volunteers. Thank you for helping bring this important work to life.

# Research Method

This was a mixed method research, combining both qualitative (interviews, focus groups) and quantitative (surveys) approaches. While qualitative research methods can seem more time consuming, research shows that for an in-depth understanding that honours the lived experience of those involved, qualitative methods are more appropriate.

The methodology is inspired by grounded theory (GT), the most widely used qualitative research framework in the social sciences (Bryant & Charmaz, 2010; Bryman & Bell, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Reichertz, 2007). The primary purpose of grounded theory as a method is the generation of insights that have explanatory power over the area under study. Such theory does not aim to be highly abstract and removed from the empirical reality but is grounded in the real world and has relevance to the social actors involved (Algera, 2014).

The area under study, youth volunteering, has received limited academic attention and has remained relatively under-theorised. The GT method is particularly suitable for phenomena or topics that have been given superficial or limited attention within the literature (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007; Charmaz, 2006; Goulding, 2002; P. Y. Martin & Turner, 1986). Given its focus on generating new theory as it emerges from the data, rather than testing hypotheses, a lack of prior knowledge is seen as an advantage in this methodology as prior knowledge might force the researcher into consciously or unconsciously testing hypotheses rather than directly observing the data (Algera, 2014; Glaser, 1978).

This pragmatic focus of GT was also an important influence in (loosely) adopting this method. We wanted to gather data that have practical relevance for the SVA and those under study. Throughout the GT research process, data gathering and data analysis happened simultaneously. In this way, the grounded theory “style” is flexible and fluid in that the researcher can adjust the sample, the data sources, the methods of data collection to respond to specific insights as they arise throughout the research process (Algera, 2014; Glaser, 1978; Suddaby, 2006). In the case of this research, this flexibility was preferable over a more rigid research design as it is exploratory.

Given the time and resources available for this research project, it was not feasible to collect and analyse data in a way that is completely consistent with the emergent GT philosophy. For instance, while GT advocates an approach without any predefined research questions or conceptualisations, we did adopt a loose research question. The research question read: What is the impact of the SVA Award programme on a young person’s life, and what could be improved upon to serve young people better? Also, while GT advocates a conservative approach to the use of extant literature (Glaser, 2008; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Gummesson, 2000), we did include a short literature review to orientate the interviews. The study evolved from this tentative literature base.

We mainly used thematic analysis when analysing the orientating conversations, focus groups, in-depth interviews and open survey questions. We used a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to analyse the surveys.

## Project Plan and Chapters

To achieve the outcomes listed above, a four-phase project plan was followed. The first 3 phases focused on data collection (described in Chapter 1 to 3), and in the last phase we brought the findings together and drew conlucions in relation to the research questions (described in Chapter 4).

| Approach | Chapter |
|---|---|
| Phase 1: Orientation<br><br>The aim of this phase was to understand the status quo, focus the research and provide the basis for the interviews in the Phase 2. This first phase had four components:<br>1) Review of existing, relevant academic literature in relation to benefits of volunteering<br>2) Five orientating one-on-one conversations with key people within SVA, teachers and School Kit<br>3) A review of relevant data currently being collected by SVA<br>4) Reflection on findings | 1 |
| Phase 2: Deepening: Focus groups and interviews<br><br>The aim of phase 2 was an in-depth exploration of the outcomes experienced as a result of the SVA Service Award across several areas of a young person's life; whether these outcomes address actual student needs; how needs can be better met through SVA's services; and what barriers are experienced to participate or continue participation in the programme. This phase had three components:<br>1) In-depth one-to-one, semi-structured interviews with teachers who serve as access point for the programme and a university student who used to be involved with the programme<br>2) Five focus groups with secondary students participating in the SVA Service Award<br>3) Analysis of findings | 2 |
| Phase 3: The Survey: Exploring impact over a large sample<br><br>The aim of Phase 3 was to evaluate the outcomes and impact of the SVA Service Award over a large sample of students partaking in the programme. In an online survey we evaluated the programme's impact and the SVA's performance over the indicators and areas identified in Phase 2. This phase had two main components:<br>1) Create and execute an online survey among a large sample of SVA Service Award secondary school participants<br>2) Collate survey findings | 3 |
| Phase 4: Analysis of Findings: Current impact and pathways to improvement<br><br>The aim of the Phase 4 was to collate the findings of the previous phases and draw conclusions in relation to SVA's impact and outcomes across its services, student experiences and areas of improvement. | 4 |

# Ethical Research

The research took the principles and guidelines for ethical research and evaluation as guidance:

1) Respect for human beings: This involves honouring the rights, privacy, dignity, entitlements and diversity of those contributing to research. This was core to the research approach and reflected in how we treated and approached participants. Informed consent is of fundamental importance, and research participants were given the choice to voluntarily participate in the research process, were provided with clear information about the research and were able to withdraw at any time, without consequence.
2) Beneficence: The aim of the research focused on how the SVA can better serve the needs of student beneficiaries. We remained vigilant as not to create stress or harm in the process of conducting this research to participants. Both the interviews and focus groups aimed to be a safe and fun spaces to share experiences. At all times during the focus groups there was an experienced facilitator present to guide the process and guard the wellbeing of students.
3) Research merit and integrity: This research is deemed to have merit in that it is well-justified, meets relevant quality criteria and was conducted by a team of people with appropriate skills: an experienced social science researcher (research lead Puck Algera, PhD); two facilitators with an academic background and experience in working with tertiary students (Monica Monica Fa'asu & Josephine Varghese, PhD); and knowledgeable and skilled SVA staff. Its potential benefit is improved experiences and well-being, resilience, employability and confidence for beneficiaries. Its wider benefit is to grow enthusiasm for volunteering among young people in New Zealand.
4) Justice: We aspired to a fair process for recruitment of research participants. We also aim to make findings accessible to participants in a timely, clear manner in a format that is meaningful for participants.

To protect the identity of participants, all names in the report are pseudonyms.




# Phase 1:

# Orientation: Observations and Initial Themes

## 1.1. Overview

The aim of Phase 1 was to orientate and focus the research. This meant creating a deeper understanding of the research needs, but also reviewing internal information relevant to the research area. This further included orientating conversations with beneficiaries and stakeholders of the programme, as well as SVA staff. We also did a literature review of the existing academic literature on youth volunteering. The findings of Phase 1 would provide the basis for the deepening interviews and focus groups in Phase 2. This phase was completed between June – Aug 2021 by research lead Puck Algera.

## 1.2. Literature Review - Benefits for the Benefactor: Positive Outcomes of Youth Volunteering

### 1.2.1. Introduction

Volunteering is a particular form of civic engagement that involves sustained and goal-directed efforts with the intention of benefitting others, which is conducted in a structured role without any obligation (MacNeela & Gannon, 2014; Penner, 2002). Volunteerism is one of the many ways in which people can do good for others, their community and society as a whole. At the same time, research shows that volunteer service also has intrinsic benefits and rewards (Snyder & Omoto, 2009).

A review of the recent academic and grey literature on youth volunteering shows a number of findings relevant to the SVA Service Award. Given the limited literature available on youth volunteering, and in particular in the NZ context, there is an opportunity for this research project to add to the current understanding of youth volunteering and its impact.

### 1.2.2. Youth Volunteering and Its Benefits

There is growing interest in the importance and benefits of youth/student volunteering and service-learning[1]. Student volunteering is increasingly part of the zeitgeist of schools and Universities "as they seek to demonstrate their commitment to ensuring the health, well-being and employability of their students, and contributing to their local communities" (Williamson et al., 2018, p. 383). In addition, given that young people[2] are less engaged in community efforts and civic engagement in general than their counterparts of 30 years ago (Astin et al., 2006), there is growing interest in the role of educational institutions "in preparing students to assume the responsibilities of citizenship in a democratic society" through service-learning and volunteering (p. 2).

There is a number of studies that have looked specifically at the outcomes and benefits of youth and student volunteering, with most of these focused on college or university age students. These studies cover different areas of benefits, such as school & academic outcomes; career & skill related outcomes; health & wellbeing outcomes; social & civic

[1] Service-learning is service performed as part of a formal course, while volunteerism or generic service is not necessarily attached to coursework.
[2] Generally defined as those between 18 and 29 years old.

outcomes; and risk behaviour. These areas are addressed here; they are not mutually exclusive and there is overlap between them.

### School & Academic Outcomes

Johnson, Beebe, Mortimer and Snyder (1998) looked at the effects of high school volunteerism and found that adolescents who become involved in volunteer activities have "higher educational plans and aspirations, higher grade point averages, higher academic self-esteem, and higher intrinsic motivation toward school work" (p. 309). A large panel study of U.S. college students by Astin and Sax's (1998), similarly showed positive associations between volunteering and academic attainment and self-confidence (Astin & Sax, 1998). Vogelgesang and Astin (2000) found that participating in service (both community service and service-learning), even after controlling for 'inputs' such as high school GPA and institutional type, had a positive effect on cognitive and academic outcomes, like a "growth in critical thinking and in writing skills and college GPA (grade-point average)" (p. 30).

Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda and Yee (2000)'s longitudinal study of a national sample of students at various colleges and universities in the US (a total of 22,236 students) found that service participation has significant positive effects on 11 outcome measures: academic performance (GPA, writing skills, critical thinking skills), values (commitment to activism and to promoting racial understanding), self-efficacy, leadership (leadership activities, self-rated leadership ability, interpersonal skills), choice of a service career, and plans to participate in service after college" (P. 4).

Geller, Zuckerman and Seidel (2016)'s review of the literature links service-learning to a host of desirable outcomes for both students and schools. For students, service-learning can increase school engagement (Billig, Root, & Jesse, 2005; Scales, Blyth, Berkas, & Kielsmeier, 2000) and reduce the risk of high school drop-outs (Bridgeland, DiIulio Jr, & Morison, 2006). Service-learning is also associated with important school-level outcomes, like improved student–teacher and peer relationships (Melchior, 1999) and fewer behavioural issues (Follman & Muldoon, 1997). Their review also highlighted improved civic and social competencies (Billig et al., 2005; Melchior, 1999).

### Career & Skill-Related Outcomes

Celio, Durlak and Dymnicki (2011) found that students engaging in service learning grew their skills "related to communication, leadership, and problem solving" (p. 165). Research on course-based service-learning demonstrates that it can strengthen interpersonal skills and self-efficacy, and feelings of social responsibility (Astin et al., 2006). According to MacNeela and Gannon (2014), student volunteering helps with seeing oneself as a person capable of responsibility, and increasing the self-belief in one's professional competence. Eyler and Giles (1999) note that while research is lacking in the area of cognitive development, a positive effect of service-learning has been identified on critical thinking ability and the comprehension of complex problems.

Paine, McKay and Moro (2013) mention that "volunteering has been linked with the development (and/or maintenance) of job specific or 'hard' skills …, soft skills such as team work and communication … and 'civic' skills such as fundraising" and that young people in particular are likely to report such skills-related gains (p. 361). They further point out that there is a positive correlation between volunteering and human capital. Human capital (the

skills, knowledge and experience possessed by individuals or groups), in turn, is positively associated with employability.

Johnson et al. (1998) found that "volunteering enhanced intrinsic work values and decreased the anticipated importance of career" (p. 326); volunteering exposed "adolescents to a more altruistic side of work and make[s] salient the more intrinsic benefits of employment" (p. 326). With the growing importance of social enterprise and purpose-driven business in creating social and environmental change, creating awareness around the intrinsic value of work among young adults is important to ensure much needed skills and energy flowing towards these kinds of organisations.

Vogelgesang and Astin (2000) found that the choice for a service-related career is strongly affected by participating in community service and by service-learning: "students who participate in community service … are more likely than their nonparticipant classmates to say they plan to pursue a service-related career" (p. 31) …. Furthermore, "the differences among … freshman 'undecided' students are particularly remarkable: 41.3% of those who engaged in service-learning during college planned to pursue a service-related career … compared to only 18.5 of undecided students who didn't participate in service" (p. 32). They note that "the positive effects of service-learning on the student's career choice may well represent the most significant finding to emerge from this inquiry" (p. 32).

There are limited studies that address the connection between volunteering and upward social mobility. However, Snellman, Silva, Frederick, and Putnam (2015) did find that participation in extracurricular activities has positive implications for social mobility and adult success. "For children from less-advantaged backgrounds, the social connections and character traits gleaned from extracurricular activities may offer the key to upward mobility and a secure middle-class life" (p. 204).

### Health & Wellbeing Outcomes

While there are limited studies available that focus explicitly on health and wellbeing outcomes of volunteering for high school students, various studies focused on university students highlight a positive relationship between student volunteering and different aspects of wellbeing.

Williamson et al. (2018)'s research into British University students, for instance, suggests that volunteering has the potential to enhance students' wellbeing across several domains. They found considerable evidence of "positive emotional experiences accrued as a result of volunteering, a sense of meaning and purpose in the volunteer role, engagement at both individual and community-based levels, the relationships that students build with fellow volunteers and, indeed, their 'service-users' and the accomplishment that stems from 'a job done well'" (p. 397). Furthermore, "volunteering, which has been shown to have a positive effect on psychological well-being … may act as a way of increasing confidence and therefore fostering resilience especially in emerging adults as they develop their identities" (p. 394). They conclude that universities have considerable potential "to both influence and promote health and well-being and act as catalysts for societal change by providing the setting for a number of life transitions for students of all ages, thus, having the opportunity to positively influence the skills they develop, their well-being and their contribution to society" (p. 384).

Bowman, Brandenberger, Lapsley, Hill and Quaranto (2010) looked more specifically at whether community engagement during the college years predicts adult well-being.

Looking at more than 400 students 13 years after graduating, the results show that both college volunteering and service-learning have "positive, indirect effects on several forms of well-being during adulthood, including personal growth, purpose in life, environmental mastery, and life satisfaction. Specifically, these college experiences are associated with subsequent behaviours (adult volunteering) and attitudes and values (prosocial orientation), which in turn are positively associated with well-being" (p. 14).

Addressing not just wellbeing and health, Celio et al. (2011), in a meta-analysis of 62 studies involving 11,837 students, found that students participating in service learning programmes demonstrated significant gains in five outcome areas: "attitudes toward self, attitudes toward school and learning, civic engagement, social skills, and academic performance" (p. 164). Service learning students demonstrated "increases in self-esteem and self-concept, more highly internalized moral standards, … greater interest … and sensitivity toward their communities and their needs, and stronger beliefs that one can make a difference in the world" (p. 165).

### Social Outcomes: Civic Identity & Civic Engagement

Researchers also identified social outcomes and benefits of youth volunteering. Yates and Youniss (1996) suggest that youth volunteering is beneficial to prosocial and community-orientated identity development. Their study found that doing community service in high school stimulates reflection on oneself in relation to others in society, consideration of the moral order and political organisation of society, and one's role in social change. Johnson et al. (1998) found that youth volunteers are likely to become invested in their community as adults. They further suggest that "volunteering encourages self-exploration with respect to values, job interests, and one's role in the community. It may also foster relationships with civic-minded adults and peers, and promote prosocial norms" (p. 326). Snyder and Omoto (2009) found that adults who started volunteering when they were young were twice as likely to volunteer and give more when they were adults.

The "most striking finding" to emerge from Hart, Donnelly, Youniss and Atkins (2007)'s analysis was that "high school community service predicted adult voting and volunteering …. Being required to perform community service in high school was associated with higher rates of voting in adulthood" (p. 213). Using data from a two-wave panel survey of high school students, Kahne, Crow and Lee (2013) found that service learning opportunities "increase community-based and expressive actions … and promote commitments to participatory citizenship." (p. 419).

One study showed that service-learning students also showed larger decreases in racial prejudice than those who did not participate in service-learning (Myers-Lipton, 1994). Vogelgesang and Astin (2000) mention that the independent effect of service-learning "on a student's commitment to promoting racial understanding and activism is noteworthy" (p. 30). This suggests that "service-learning provides a concrete means by which institutions of higher education can educate students to become concerned and involved citizens" (p. 30).

As mentioned, civic engagement and a sense of responsibility for local and global issues is important given the pressing social and environmental issues the world is faced with that require young people's interest, participation and skills.

### Risk Behaviour & Substance Abuse

In their literature review, MacNeela and Gannon (2014) note that risk avoidance is one of the outcomes of youth volunteering. University student volunteers report less involvement in risk behaviours such as binge drinking and cannabis use. When volunteers engage in purposeful service, they actively disavow a hedonistic, alcohol-oriented university experience and the normative student culture of binge drinking. Volunteering becomes an alternative focus, that bolsters self-perceptions of autonomy (Cox & McAdams, 2012; MacNeela & Gannon, 2014, p. 428; Seider, 2007). MacNeela and Gannon (2014) highlight the importance of "promoting volunteering among students during school and university years, when developmental concerns and access to engagement opportunities coincide" (p. 408).

Weitzman and Kawachi (2000) examined campus-level patterns of participation in voluntary activities, as an indicator of social capital, in relation to binge drinking in college. Their study found that students from campuses with higher-than-average levels of social capital had lower individual risk for binge drinking than their peers at other schools. They suggest that "campuses with high levels of social capital may provide the patterns of interconnectedness and mutual obligation required for collective regulation of deviancy in a group" (p. 1936).

In terms of the relationship between student volunteering and substance abuse, Youniss, McLellan, Su and Yates (1999) found that "participation in community service is a relatively potent predictor of normative, nonnormative, and deviant behavior and attitudes among high school seniors" (p. 257). They found that volunteer activities expose students to "norms and values that provide reflective material at a critical moment in identity development" and that engaging in community service was "negatively associated with marijuana use, indicating again the normative character that service supports" (p. 250).

## 1.2.3. Quality of the Volunteering Experience

Some researchers highlight that a key factor in whether or not service or service learning has a strong impact on students is related to the quality of the volunteering or service experience (Astin et al., 2006). This relates to both the number of hours spent in service, but also (interestingly) the use of reflection: "The effects of both service-learning and generic community service appear to be mediated in part by the use of reflection. In particular, reflective discussions of the service experience both with student peers and with professors accounts for some, but not all, of the positive effects of service-learning and generic community service on post-college civic engagement" (Astin et al., 2006, p. vii).

Several researchers have emphasised the quality of the reflection itself (e.g. Ikeda, 1999; Mabry, 1998). Ikeda (1999) found that doing a critical analysis of the social issues faced in the service-learning experience is important in creating outcomes like increased sense of self-efficacy[3], awareness of personal values and school engagement. A large-scale study of Learn and Serve America participants further showed that students who volunteered

[3] Self-efficacy refers to "an individual's belief in his or her capacity to execute behaviors necessary to produce specific performance attainments (Bandura, 1977, 1986, 1997). Self-efficacy reflects confidence in the ability to exert control over one's own motivation, behavior, and social environment" ("Teaching tip sheet: Self-efficacy," 2009)

more than 20 hours per week, actively applied course principles to their service experiences, and discussed these in class experienced the greatest improvement in academic and life-skill outcomes (Astin et al., 2006; M. J. Gray et al., 1998). This suggests that "the design and quality of service-learning programs play[s] a critical role in determining the effectiveness of these programs" (Astin et al., 2006, p. 7).

### 1.2.4. Reflection on the Existing Literature

The literature clearly shows the benefits of youth volunteering in a range of outcome areas (summarised in the table below); from attitude to self, attitude to school and learning, social orientation and civic engagement, social and professional skills, and academic performance. It further links the positive emotional experiences (e.g. increased confidence) accrued from volunteering, to increased wellbeing and resilience. The positive impact on adult wellbeing was also mentioned. This impact was often indirect, e.g. student service learning or generic volunteering positively impacts prosocial attitudes and values, and propensity to volunteer as an adult, which in turn are positively associated with well-being.

| Benefit Areas in Literature | Specifics | References |
|---|---|---|
| School engagement and other school level outcomes | • Increased school engagement<br>• Reduced risk of high school drop-outs<br>• Improved student–teacher and peer relationships<br>• Fewer behavioural issues. | (Billig et al., 2005; Bridgeland et al., 2006; Follman & Muldoon, 1997; Melchior, 1999; Scales et al., 2000) |
| Academic aspirations, achievements & school performance | | (Astin & Sax, 1998; Celio et al., 2011; Geller et al., 2016; Johnson et al., 1998) |
| Risk avoidance and substance abuse | • Reduces risk behaviour in relation to drugs and alcohol | (MacNeela & Gannon, 2014; Weitzman & Kawachi, 2000; Youniss et al., 1999) |
| Leadership skills | • Leadership activities, self-rated leadership ability, interpersonal skills | (Astin et al., 2000; Celio et al., 2011) |
| Professional skills | • Development or maintenance of job specific or 'hard' skills, soft skills such as team work and communication, and 'civic' skills such as fundraising<br>• Critical thinking; Better writing skills Interpersonal skills | (Astin et al., 2000; Astin et al., 2006; Vogelgesang & Astin, 2000) |
| Employability/Work readiness | • Human capital, which relates to skills, knowledge and experience of individual or group, is positively associated with employability | (Paine et al., 2013) |
| Improved civic and social/interpersonal competencies | • Service-learning can play a role in building the knowledge base, inclinations, and the skill sets necessary for civic engagement | (Astin et al., 2006, p. 6; Billig et al., 2005; Celio et al., 2011; Melchior, 1999) |
| Attitude towards self, self-confidence, self-belief, self-efficacy, resilience | • Positive effect on psychological well-being[ may act as a way to increase confidence and fostering resilience especially in emerging adults as they develop their identities<br>• Student volunteering helps with seeing oneself as a person capable of responsibility, and the belief of having become more competent in professional skills | (Astin & Sax, 1998; Astin et al., 2000; Astin et al., 2006; Celio et al., 2011; Johnson et al., 1998; MacNeela & Gannon, 2014; Poulin, 2014) |
| Social orientation, social | • Values (commitment to activism and to promoting racial understanding). | (Astin et al., 2000; Bowman et al., 2010; |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| responsibility, community-mindedness | • Feelings of social responsibility, prosocial understanding.<br>• Beneficial to prosocial and community-orientated identity development. Reflection on self in relation to others in society, consideration of the moral order and political organisation of society, and one's role in social change.<br>• Encourages self-exploration with respect to values, job interests, and one's role in the community. | Johnson et al., 1998; Kahne et al., 2013; Myers-Lipton, 1994) |
| Adult voting and political engagement | | (Astin et al., 2006; Hart et al., 2007; Kahne et al., 2013) |
| Adult volunteering | • Plans to participate in service after college, more likely to be invested in community as adults | (Astin et al., 2000; Bowman et al., 2010; Johnson et al., 1998; Snyder & Omoto, 2009) |
| Pro-social career choice | • Choosing a service related career<br>• Promotes looking for intrinsic work values and decreased anticipated importance of career. | (Johnson et al., 1998; Vogelgesang & Astin, 2000) |

Table 1: Benefits of Youth Volunteering Summary

It will be interesting to see whether the benefits mentioned above turn out to be relevant within our study, because

- Many of the existing studies draw from American samples, and none from New Zealand samples.
- Many of the existing studies look predominantly at university age students rather than high school age students, in particular when it comes to health and wellbeing outcomes.
- These studies draw mainly on the positive effects of service-learning activities rather than generic volunteering. Service learning is service performed as part of a formal course, while volunteerism or generic service is not necessarily attached to coursework. The difference between service learning and volunteering is relevant because: Service learning (as opposed to generic volunteering) allows guided (individual or collective) reflection on the volunteering experience in the context of the course. As discussed, researchers highlight that a key factor in whether or not volunteering has a strong positive impact on students is related to the quality of the volunteering or service experience, which relates to both the number of hours spent in service but also reflection on the experience.
- Community level outcomes: While volunteering has the potential to create mutually beneficial relationships between schools and communities, little research has explored the benefit of service-learning from the community's perspective. While this is not a specific focus of our research, we may unearth some findings in this area.
- Upward social mobility: Existing research shows that engaging in extracurricular activities has positive implications for social mobility. However, there are limited studies that address the link between volunteering and upward social mobility explicitly or specifically. It will be interesting to see whether the SVA Award Programme has a positive impact in this area: e.g. does offering the SVA Summary of Service allow upward mobility by creating visibility around volunteering (see also interview reflections below).

These 'gaps' in the existing literature highlight potential areas of contribution of this study.

### 1.2.5. Research Notes

Within Grounded Theory we do not test hypotheses (e.g. hypothesis X: volunteering positively impacts self-confidence) but focus on what naturally emerges from the study subjects. This means that our study may not highlight all benefits that the literature notes. At the same time, in formulating the interview and focus group questions, we will be broadly guided by the categories of benefits found in this review. Also, some of the benefits mentioned in the literature will only be measurable through longitudinal studies (studies that follow participants over time), like adult voting or employability/work readiness.

## 1.3. Interviews: Findings and Initial Themes

We further orientated the research through a number of semi-structured, in-depth interviews with key parties involved with the SVA Service Award programme. We used purposive sampling; we chose people who would have in-depth knowledge of the programme and have engaged in it.

Five one-hour semi-structured interviews were held with two SVA staff; a teacher who has worked extensively with the SVA Service Award programme; a student who is actively engaged in the programme; and contract partner School Kit, who does the outreach to schools and provides support to teachers. Interview guides were inspired by the literature review. Interviews were recorded and (partly) transcribed, or notes were made during the interview. The notes and transcriptions are not included in this public report for privacy reasons.

### 1.3.1. Initial Themes and Observations

Here are some initial observations and themes that arose from the orientating conversations. They are presented here through a number of quotes from the interviews. These are observations, and are not set in stone, but help focus the thinking and research going forward.

#### The Programme is Egalitarian and Unifies

- It appeals to all students and schools: “We expected that the programme would appeal to reasonably conservative single-sex schools that like badges and uniforms already. We completely got that wrong …. it spans the whole spectrum of schools. You got your Auckland Grammar, your Christ’s College and then you have Ngata college. You have single sex, you have co-ed, you have religious, you just got that huge spread.” – School Kit
- “It is … quite egalitarian in its nature. 10 hours at a private school in Auckland are worth the same as 10 hours at a local school. Schools love that they can be Stratford Highschool and can be the same as Christ’s College. They love that their kids can enter into the same system.” – School Kit
- “The egalitarian nature of it, is in its definition of volunteering. It doesn’t specify this is and this isn’t, that is up to you to define. So you have cultural definitions, location definitions …. It has shown us that we can be extraordinarily flexible in diverse communities.” – School Kit

- School Kit talked about a mother at a school with predominantly Maori students: “The woman was almost in tears, because this was something that her kids could get recognised for. It meant that they were the same as Auckland Grammar, or Christ’s College.”

### Visibility and Social Worth

- “So many kids are carers at home and never saw that as having any social worth. It is heart-breaking …. I want there to be a tv campaign, I want the adults to recognise it as well. It is not just the students.” – Teacher
- “It is bringing parents to prize giving. We have awards that just are focused on that volunteering, we call it manakitanga. Those students that bring so much, that has become something we celebrate as a thing. So that has been hugely beneficial.” – Teacher
- “It is shocking the percentage of our kids that do crazy hours of caring for others, it is just unfair. If at least we can help them to feel good about it and give them some support …. It was horrifying and hidden how many kids are doing this much caring at home, and that is credit for this programme, because it gives visibility and allows us to have conversations about it …. Also allowed for a lot more help to go to these families, like mental health counselling and meals, which has stopped it from becoming a dirty secret a bit.” – Teacher

### Confidence and Pride

- “And the kids that volunteer, they have become more confident, they all say that. Over the years of doing these programmes, they have grown far more than they thought they ever would. They used to be the kids that hid in the corner …. They say the gains for them are huge. And they come back after they left school, and they are still saying that. That is why we are so keen to keep going with it!” – Teacher
- Definitely feel more confident. It has boosted her confidence socially and also with organising events. If we had done this interview before she got those experiences, she would not be this talkative. – Student

### Students Desire to Give Back & Make A Difference

- “Virtually all of them, they just want to give back. That is 99% of them. They used to feel frustrated that there wasn’t a way for that and that they got a bad rep as teenagers and now they feel a lot more respected in school.” – Teacher
- “It is just being able to spend time that is helpful in some way, being able to help out. I have time to spare. [I like] making things happen in the community.” – Student

### Improved Student - Teacher Relationship

- “We just have a lot more to do with the SVA kids …. It is a completely different relationship with those SVA students. I actually rely on them a lot, and they rely on me too. Like, … some group is coming over to visit and I offered to cook breakfast for them for two days … And I am confident to put a message out and getting 20 or so kids committing to helping out…. That is quite important for communities and that’s really kind of amazing!” - Teacher

## Reflections on Summary of Service

The Summary of Service is a cornerstone feature of the SVA Service Award. It is a tool through which students can track their volunteering on a regular basis; it helps them demonstrate the types of service they have been involved with, the skills gained, the hours they put in and which Sustainable Development Goal they have helped advance.

Teacher:

- "I thought it was brilliant … [student] resumes look better and they can verbalise what they have been doing beyond 'cleaned beach'."
- "It has definitely become far more important [to show you are community orientated] for scholarships. Like our school, for its decile and West Coast location, gets a lot of scholarship money, maybe 80 or a 100 k. That is a lot of money here. It used to be that those scholarships went to top academics, top sports teams, and now that the school has bought into the SVA stuff [we get these scholarships] …. These kids are going: 'I have been doing this stuff for years and now this is seen as good! That is kind of great! Maybe I can get a scholarship, maybe I can go to university.' It has opened up that kind of thinking."

## Gain Social Capital through Connection

The teacher explained that her students, who are part of a rural community on the South Island, are incredibly keen to be more connected to, and involved with, the wider SVA 'community.' Students want to share knowledge and ask questions; get a better understanding of 'where do we fit in;' but also being able to grow their 'social capital' by making connections. As the teacher said, "What these kids really need is … the ability to make connections that aren't the Coast. And I think the SVA is potentially a great way to make it easier to make connections with a wider range of people."

- "The kids would love there to be a newsletter … they would like to feel more involved with the Christchurch [SVA/Uni], maybe they can share photos of their projects with the kids."
- "Maybe some subsidised merch …. They want to be affiliated and they still are looking for ways to do that."
- We discussed how tertiary students could be a role model for secondary students, or perhaps the connection could take the form of a 'big brother/big sister' relationship, in which the older student shares information but also offers support. "That would be amazing! Even like a camp in the holidays … and then they could pass those lessons on to the other kids when they came back. If there was just some way for these kids to make connections."
- "I just think there is lots of good people for these kids to potentially meet. And just to help them. They are so retiring these [rural] kids, they are not going to put themselves forward. They find it really hard to talk to new people, so this is a way for them to get them out there. A little more confident with that. So I see it as a way for them to gaining some social capital."




# Phase 2:

# Diving Deeper into the Student Experience

## 2.1. Overview

The aim of Phase 2 was to collect rich data about the impact of the SVA Service Award programme. We also wanted to explore what barriers students experience to participate or continue participating in the programme. We chose both in-depth one-to-one interviews and student focus groups, as they are effective ways to gather rich data about people's experiences. After the data collection, the findings of both the interviews and focus groups were analysed. This second phase was completed between Aug – Dec 2021 by Puck Algera and facilitators Monica Fa'asu and Josephine Varghese.

In 2.2 I discuss the data collection approach for both the interviews and the student focus groups; some key findings are discussed in section 2.3.

## 2.2. Data Collection

### 2.2.1. Interviews

We chose to do interviews with two teachers actively involved in the SVA Service Award programme because they could offer in-depth and reflective insights into the adoption of the programme and the students' experience of it. In addition, they could offer a different perspective to the students themselves about the benefits they see of the programme. We also added an interview with a student previously involved with the SVA Service Award programme (now pursuing tertiary education) to explore how they experienced the programme and the longer term effects of participating in SVA Service Award programme, like employability and work-readiness.

This was a case of purposive sampling, we chose those people who would have in-depth knowledge of the programme and have/had high engagement with it. This was combined with convenience sampling: we chose those who were available and willing to take part. This means that the findings of these interviews are not necessarily representative of all teachers and ex-students, and are potentially more reflective of those who are already enthusiastic about the programme. The interviewees were from different decile schools, and different locations in New Zealand. 1-hour semi-structured interviews were held with a teacher from a North Island, decile 5 school (referred to as Anna); a teacher from a South Island, decile 10 school (referred to as Bea); and ex-student, previously from a North Island, decile 5 school.

The potential interviewees were given information about the research through a Google Form (sent via email), which included an option to remain anonymous. The form included a consent form that participants were required to fill out.

The interview guides were inspired by the findings of literature review and initial themes of Phase 1. All interviews were held on Google Meet or Zoom, were recorded and (partly) transcribed. Notes were also made during the interview. The interview notes and transcriptions have not been included here for privacy reasons.

## 2.2.2. Focus Groups

Focus groups are a popular method for qualitative data collection, effective in studying attitudes and experiences of a group of people around a common topic. Focus groups help to unearth rich and complex data, something that cannot be achieved with, for instance, surveys. Although there are many definitions for focus groups, scholars agree that the central aspect of this method is group interaction (Barbour, 2005; Barbour & Kitzinger, 1998; Terrell, 2009).

### Focus Group Composition

While we did not set out to do a comparative research, we did want to ensure that a mix of voices were heard. We wanted to have geographical diversity, and not just hear from schools in Canterbury, an area that the SVA has historically engaged with more. We wanted to hear from students from both very engaged schools and less engaged schools. And we wanted to include students from a range of different decile schools. We decided on 5 focus groups of the following composition:

- Group 1: Highly engaged school, single school, lower/medium decile
- Group 2: South Island, mixed school group, low/medium decile
- Group 3: South Island, mixed school group, higher decile
- Group 4: North Island, mixed school group, low/medium decile
- Group 5: North Island, mixed school group, higher decile

Decile 0-7 schools were considered “low/medium” decile, and decile 8 and up were considered “high” decile[4]. For Group 1 we chose students from a single, very engaged school, the other focus groups consisted of students from a mix of schools. We chose to group students together from similar decile schools, as we expected that students would feel more comfortable with peers from similar decile schools and that this would in turn enable better engagement in the sessions. We chose small groups, 6-10 per group, to enable better and more personable online engagement with and between students. The focus group sessions were up to 1.5 hours each to minimise online fatigue.

### Recruitment

Students for Group 1 were found with the help of the teacher we interviewed in Phase 1, participants for the other focus groups were recruited with the help of the SVA. The SVA sent out an email in September 2021, which contained information about the purpose of the research as well as a link to an information and consent form. Potential research participants were given the option to withdraw at any moment and could also choose to remain anonymous. Students could confirm their interest to participate by signing the consent form (in Google Forms), of which the research lead was informed. Students were then assigned to one of the five focus groups. Engagement was incentivised as the hours would count as volunteer hours and an SVA t-shirt was offered to all participants. For Group 2, the SVA also offered a $20 Skinny voucher.

[4] In future, it might be worth having a lower, medium and higher split but this was not possible given the limited responses from lower/medium decile schools.

We had some challenges with recruitment: the higher decile groups were oversubscribed, while lower decile Groups 2 and 4 remained under the 6 person minimum. An evaluation of those interested in participation, shows that students from higher decile schools had more interest (70%) in being part of the focus groups than those from lower decile schools. No students from decile 1 or 2 schools expressed interest in participation.

## Content of Focus Groups

In particular in an online environment, lowering barriers to engagement and encouraging inclusion is key. We also wanted to ensure that interaction, reflection and engagement would be maximised. We did this through icebreaker exercises, starting with easy questions and using online tools such as Jamboard (an interactive Google whiteboard where participants can post comments through text or 'sticky notes'). Among others things, Jamboard allowed students to participate even if they were not comfortable speaking up. On advice of the teachers, we also sent the questions we would discuss ahead of time, to allow students time to prepare, and hopefully help (more shy) students to speak up.
Our exploration of the impact of the SVA Service Award with the focus group students was informed by the literature review and the initial themes of Phase 1. We also made time to explore the students' motivation for joining, their definition of volunteering, and how they find volunteering projects. An outline of the topics and questions discussed were made available in the original report.

## Who Were the Participants?

Some of those assigned to a focus group were not able to make it, due to study, work or other commitments. As it was nearing the end of the year, many saw an increase in schoolwork and several students were preparing for NCEA exams. Focus groups 1 and 5 were well attended, but Group 2 (South Island, low/med decile), Group 3 (South Island, high decile) and Group 4 (North Island, low/med decile) were less well attended. A total of 25 students attended the focus groups. In terms of geographical representation (not counting those from Group 1 as they were all from one location), North Island students were overrepresented with 78%. In the four mixed school focus groups, the vast majority of students was from higher decile schools (78%). The male representation across all focus groups was extremely low, with only 8%. There was variety in terms of school year.

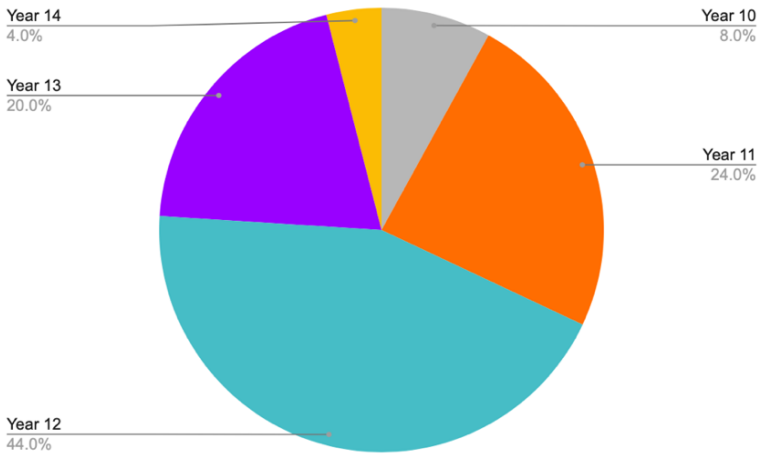



Figure 1: Distribution across school years

## Focus Groups Learnings

We learned a number of things from doing the focus groups:

### Reflective ability of students:

The facilitators were impressed with the reflective ability of students. The students were open and able to reflect on their personal experiences and on what they learned. They elaborated on how they felt and how the experience tied in which what is important to them. In addition, the facilitators were surprised at how well students were able grasp concepts like social capital, self-efficacy or reciprocal community. Students showed an interest in learning about these concepts. “We underestimate how smart they are,” said one of the facilitators.

### The value of focus groups:

- Focus groups as reflection point: The process of reflection has a significant impact on how we make sense of our actions and experiences. The focus group discussions provided an avenue for this. The focus groups became more than just ‘data collection,’ they became a vehicle for students learning together and deepening their understanding of the experience. Also, there was value in reflecting on projects that students did as a team; this produced an engaged and enlightening discussion. Teachers and students alike said that there is too little time to reflect on volunteering experiences, so the focus groups were experienced as valuable in themselves.
- Focus groups as honouring the students’ voices: Student voices are honoured through focus groups. Many of the participants valued having their voices heard. As one student poignantly said, “Thank you so much for speaking to me and Sarah about our opinions because not many people want to know our opinions because they think they know better than us.”

### We did not hear all voices:

- Engaging lower decile students was hard: Getting lower decile students to be part of the focus groups was challenging. This was a shame because this is one group the SVA really wants to hear from. This is an important area to explore further and gain a better understanding of the ways to engage these students more (more on this in Chapter 4).
- Male students were underrepresented: Similar questions could be asked about the lack of male respondents. With 92% of the focus group participants being female, the findings do not reflect a male perspective.
- The role of ethnicity: The ethnicity of students was not recorded. In future, it would be interesting to evaluate the findings in light of ethnicity. The findings suggest that the programme may not impact all students in the same way. For instance, students from marginalised and minority communities, or students who are new to New Zealand and are in the process of integrating into society more fully, may experience different direct and indirect benefits from the programme than others. They may also have different needs. The SVA may want to deepen this understanding if they want to be more intentional about, and prioritise, creating certain impact. This will be discussed in Chapter 4.

## 2.3. Some Findings of the Interviews & Focus Groups

An analysis of the findings of the interviews and focus groups is presented in Chapter 4. So for the sake of brevity, this section will only highlight a selection of Phase 2 findings; these were selected because they were either noteworthy or because they are not addressed elsewhere in the report. For those interested in the more detailed findings of this phase, please refer to Appendix A and B.[5]

### *2.3.1. General Teacher Feedback on Programme*

Some of the general feedback provided by teachers:

- Their school loves that the programme enables students to take ownership of their service activities; making service activities student-driven, not teacher-driven. (Bea)
- SVA Award programme minimises work for teachers, e.g. in relation to having to verify and sign off service activities. Bea mentioned that her school uses a high trust model, in which students are responsible for recording and verifying their own service activities.
- Super grateful for the programme, as it pre-empts what schools needed or wanted to do. (Bea)
- In terms of how to run the programme, the school loves the flexibility and autonomy. (Bea)
- Approachability of the SVA staff; always helpful. (Bea)

### 2.3.2. Motivation to Participate

Teachers mentioned that the design of the programme aids in motivating students because "students love the pins." Both teachers said that at their schools, wearing the badges is "cool" and students proudly wear them on their shirts or lapels. Students see the pins as "a kudos thing" for their accomplishments and service to the community, a demonstration of involvement, and are excited to receive them. At Anna's school, the gaining hours and badges has become competitive amongst students; this really works for their school as it is aligned with the school's culture of sportiness and competition.

From the focus groups, it became clear that the vast majority of students was already volunteering. Some had taken the initiative to volunteer by themselves, others had already been engaged through more formalised groups, like the Leo group or the Duke of Edinburgh Programme. The SVA Service Award programme was a way to formalise or administrate volunteering activities, or to get more deeply involved in volunteering activities. The few students who had not volunteered before, already had an inclination towards 'helping' or 'wanting to do more.' One student, Tom, described how he was shoulder tapped by someone from the Senior Leadership Team at this school, who had noticed that "I was always out there and just wanting to help and support other people and [she] just recommended me doing [the programme]." What this shows is that those who participated in the focus groups (and perhaps who were the most vocal during the focus groups) were predominantly students who had a high motivation to volunteer already and had enough initiative to find an outlet for that desire. It is good to keep in mind that this will not be the same across the board; those students who are not involved with the programme, or those

[5] The ex-student findings are excluded here for brevity, but were part of the original report and the conclusions.

who chose not to participate in the research, may have different motivations or have a lack thereof.

### 2.3.3. Defining Volunteering

The students were asked to define volunteering quite early on in the focus group sessions. The most common way in which students (initially) defined volunteering was: 'Giving service or support to individuals or community without expecting anything in return, like praise, profit or other personal gain.' They most commonly referred to giving their time (as opposed to for instance, skills or attention), and to giving help to 'community' (as opposed to, for instance, individuals).

Even though a few students did talk about 'giving back' in their definitions, these initial focus group discussions about 'what volunteering is' focused on a relatively unidirectional or unilateral understanding of volunteering: 'I (the giver) give my time to help you (the needy)'. While this is quite a standard understanding of volunteering, from a critical scholarship perspective on volunteering, there are significant issues with this understanding. Scholars point out how volunteering can come from, and further engender, a 'saviour complex', especially when volunteers do not reflect on their privilege, who benefitted most from 'helping' or how inequality came to be. This will be addressed in more depth in Chapter 4.

Interestingly, the focus group itself proved to be one possible 'tool' in deepening students' understanding of volunteering. Facilitator Josephine noted how in Group 1, students collectively deepened their understanding around the concept of volunteering. At the start of the session, students had mostly 'standard' responses when defining volunteering (similar to above), but in the course of the discussion, they were able to reflect more deeply on their experiences, and presented more nuanced perspectives. At the end of the discussion, the group agreed that volunteering was not just a unidirectional activity, but was part of 'being within a community,' and was understood as a 'reciprocal communitarian practice'.

### *2.3.4. Barriers to Participation in the Programme*

In the interviews and the focus groups we explicitly asked why participants thought students were not getting involved with the programme and we also asked how to get more students involved. The responses from both teachers and students were quite similar. The following barriers were most commonly mentioned. Many of these are interconnected and influence one another.

Low awareness and visibility of the Programme & SVA: Students having no awareness of the programme or the SVA was mentioned as a barrier for participation. Almost all students in the focus groups had heard about the SVA and the Programme indirectly, through their teachers, school seniors or peers. But these 'channels' might not be available to, or might not work for, all students.

Not understanding volunteering: What counts and its benefits: Participants mentioned that some students see volunteering as a "kind of a scary, daunting thing." Also, many students don't realise that some of the things they are doing already would count as volunteering within the programme. Other students see volunteering as something that just takes time and saw no incentive to volunteer. Some students mentioned that their peers had

questioned why they volunteered: “I couldn’t imagine giving that many hours a week for free” or “You’re getting no job experience”. Not understanding volunteering, as well as the perception of volunteering being a waste of time and not having any benefits, are barriers to participation.

Volunteering is not cool: There was a stark difference between students within the focus groups when it came to whether volunteering was perceived as cool or not cool at their school. At some schools volunteering was encouraged and celebrated, and having pins was seen as cool among students, while at other schools volunteering was seen as not cool at all. The latter situation formed an obvious barrier to participation. More on this later on.

School is uninvolved: Some students came from schools that are highly involved in the programme; they have integrated it with the school curriculum, made it part of the school requirements and involvement is actively encouraged and celebrated. There are designated teachers who support students and opportunities for volunteering are advertised or discussed. This is not the case in all schools. Other students described their schools as being very hands-off, teachers who do not know that students are participating, and volunteering not being encouraged or celebrated. It was also clear that students from uninvolved schools received very little assistance, guidance and support when it came to finding volunteering options. The lack of involvement of a school was seen as a huge barrier for participation. Students recognised that if they had not been proactive and had a strong motivation to volunteer, it probably would have been too hard to get involved. Volunteering was also a more solitary endeavour in unengaged schools. Maria explained, “It’s been a little bit difficult for me to find projects just because my school hasn’t really been doing anything like giving opportunities to do that. I’ve kind of just had to find things on my own.”

Lack of suitable volunteer options: The lack of critical information about opportunities to volunteer was seen as a big hurdle for participation. Quite a few focus group participants mentioned that it is hard for teenagers to find volunteer projects themselves. In addition, many mentioned that the variety of projects available or ‘showcased’ by SVA was limited and not inclusive. They mentioned the following limitations to commonly available projects:

- Age: Participants mentioned that they knew many young people who wanted to volunteer, but that there were very few volunteer options available for young people.
- Physical limitations or ability: “I know people who want to volunteer, but they either have a physical disability or they physically can’t get there because their parents are working and they don’t have a driver's licence. It’s just those things of ‘I want to go, but I can’t actually get there’”.
- Geographical location: All focus groups mentioned the lack of volunteering projects available (on the SVA app/website) in their particular area or town. This barrier seemed to be more pronounced in the rural areas: “It’s the limitations of not knowing what’s in your own backyard. SVA only shows what’s in your region, but doesn’t go deep into the town. You have to actively search for that.”

As one participant summarised: “If I’m not helped or if I’m not handed the information or some source or a roadmap, I don't know where I’m going to find all of this information. Sadly, I think that’s why people don’t volunteer, because they can’t find a volunteer project that they are actually interested in, they can’t physically get there or the volunteer work they do know they can’t physically do.” She continued, “What is quite sad, really, is that they are

finding the stuff they can't do and think 'I can't contribute in my community' because of something that's possibly not their fault."

In other words, a big hurdle in participation is that those interested in volunteering are limited by personal circumstances and personal limitations, and students called for the SVA to offer suggestions or alternatives that are more inclusive and cater to a larger part of the student population.

Gap too big to next award: Students mentioned that the gap to the next level award after reaching 250 hours, was too large and may be a discouraging factor once a student reaches 250 hours.

## 2.3.5. Impact of the SVA Service Award on Students' Lives

The full impact of the SVA Service Award on students' lives will be discussed in more depth below (Chapter 3 and 4), but a few things are worth mentioning here.

### Overcoming Shyness

Interestingly, quite a few of the students mentioned that volunteering had helped them overcome shyness or helped them to deal with it better. They shared that volunteering had "kind of forced them" to communicate with people and develop social skills, which they saw as really helpful. Linda explained: "I was too shy before to really reach out to people and ask for things …. And now, working with people, has forced me to have to like talk to them, communicate with them and now I'm a little bit more confident in asking for what I need and just being more communicative." Sarah said, "The one thing I love about this programme is that it forces you out of the house. I'm a very introverted person … I don't like going to parties, I don't like going out with people in general. I like to stay in my room. When it came to volunteer work, it basically forced me outside ….It's helped me to be more comfortable around people I don't know."

### Cultural Understanding & English Language Skills

An aspect of improved communication skills related to participants with migrant backgrounds, they found that engaging in the programme had improved their English language skills. This linked also to growing their cultural understanding, understanding differences, and assisting with integrating into a new society. Samara explained: "I didn't graduate primary school in New Zealand. So working with the little kids in primary schools became an opportunity for me to learn about the New Zealand culture and how education works …. It gave me an opportunity to think about the cultural differences between New Zealand and my own country, which is South Korea."

### Attitude to Self: Self-Efficacy & Resilience

Self-efficacy speaks to the positive belief that one has the capacity and skills to achieve their goals. An increase in self-belief or self-efficacy was recurring in the vast majority of students' reflections. An example was given by Sarah (Group 4), who experienced an increase in trust in herself as a result of volunteering: "I never trusted myself with decisions, I had that fear of doing something wrong and knowing someone's going to know I did something wrong. My volunteer jobs have made me trust my decisions more." Marianna (Group 5) said, "With the skills that I have developed through volunteering, I know that I am

able to use those with other things that I do and so it's made me more comfortable and confident knowing that if I do something it'll probably be successful."

An increase in self-efficacy was often connected to doing things autonomously. Ying from Group 5 said, "It has to do with seeing what you can accomplish in your own time and of your own accord. So with volunteering, nobody is telling you what to do, so you don't do it because your teacher tells you to do it, it's more out of your own self and I think it feeds into seeing yourself in a better light and knowing you're a good person." As another example, before joining SVA, Aisha and Anja from Group 2, were sceptical about their ability to contribute to volunteering projects but once they got involved, they valued the experience. Seeing the impact on themselves, the people they served, as well as the success of the events, Aisha felt "a sense of achievement" and a "sense that I can be part of great projects and ideas".

Finally, almost every student felt that their resilience, which is the ability to cope with and adapt to new situations, had increased as a result of volunteering but few specific examples were shared on the practical experience of resilience.

### Career Choice, Work Readiness, Social Capital and Upward Social Mobility

The majority of students felt volunteering had a positive impact on their future plans and work readiness. Engaging in volunteering influenced their choice for higher studies, or clarified and strengthened their focus on a certain career path. This was reflected in choosing a study or work area that focuses on service to others. As an example, Tim (Group 4) was influenced by his volunteering experience in his decision to consider the medical profession for his future career path as he realised he has a passion for helping others.

The positive effects of volunteering like increase in skills, confidence, self-belief and self-efficacy, had, in turn, a positive impact on the students' feelings of work readiness. Sarah (Group 4) said, "I'm gaining communication skills, learning from people, I'm learning to integrate with other people of different groups from different parts of the world. I've learned how to problem solve and I'm mainly working in the business arena, so when I come to being a part of any business sector, I know I've got some skills". Many students felt that their social capital had increased through volunteering. For instance, students mentioned how they made connections with organisations and people through volunteering, which could lead to future opportunities.

Students from close knit and rural communities commented that they were already part of a community where 'everyone knows everyone' and as such the impact to raise their social capital within their own community was less felt. At the same time, when it comes to raising social capital outside their direct community, they saw great opportunities to grow their social capital through connecting with the wider SVA community and network (SVA staff, students connected with SVA, SVA clubs), as was also indicated in Phase 1 by the teacher.

### Civic Identity, Civic Understanding and Social Engagement

The literature review in Chapter 1 highlighted the social outcomes of youth volunteering. This relates to young people gaining a better understanding of self in relation to others, their values and their social responsibility; developing a pro-social identity; understanding of community and social needs; and political and social engagement. While these terms seem abstract, the focus groups gave some very clear indications of such social outcomes.

The students mentioned how their understanding of their community and the needs of the community had improved through volunteering projects, and how they felt more connected to their local community. Volunteering promoted a better understanding of people from different backgrounds in some students. Saanvika (Group 5) highlighted how volunteering can help students to broaden their perspective on society and to get out of the familiar bubble.

Only a few students mentioned that volunteering helped them “to not take things for granted” (Anja, Group 5) and to understand their privileged position. Two students in the focus groups explicitly mentioned ‘privilege’ and the role that played in their volunteering: “What is important about volunteering … was knowing that I had the privilege to be in a position to help others and that I should use that privilege to make a difference in other people's lives who aren’t as lucky as we are” (Ying, Group 5).

Some, but certainly not all, also showed an improved understanding of how they can make a difference and what kind of help would be most appropriate for those being helped. Within Group 1 this was most pronounced. A key insight from this focus group related to how projects with a universal outlook promote cohesion and wellbeing in the community, and reduce the feeling of shame among those who needed such services, thus also reducing the power difference between those ‘helping’ and those ‘being helped’. (This is discussed in more depth in Chapter 4.)

### School Influence on What Impact is Experienced

Over half of the focus group students noted an increase in pride. Recognition and visibility for achievements through pins or badges, and pride about volunteering tend to go hand in hand. The pins are a sort of visual validation, which helps them feel good about themselves. While pride is concerned with feelings about self, social worth or social desirability relates to the individual’s perception of whether she is deemed acceptable in social or interpersonal relations. It is connected to social acceptance, social approval, popularity and being a socially desirable companion ("Social Desirability,"). The majority of participants recorded an improvement in social worth as well. However, discussions in the focus groups made it clear that an increase in pride and social worth was only experienced in schools where volunteering was encouraged and celebrated both by students and staff. Kirsten and Charlotte (Group 3), for instance, strongly felt that the programme did not provide them an increased sense of social worth … among the student community because volunteering was largely seen as ‘not cool’. “

Similarly, while the focus groups and interviews showed that participating in the SVA Service Award programme had improved many students’ relationships with teachers, had strengthened their connection with the school community and peers involved with SVA, and had increased their sense of belonging, this impact was dependent on the level of involvement of the school and the school’s passion for volunteering. And, as mentioned above, the differences in the involvement between schools were stark. Although the sample was too small to draw definitive conclusions, this lack of involvement was seen across the board in both higher and lower decile schools.




# Phase 3:

# Exploring the Impact Across a Wider Sample

## 3.1. Overview

The third stage of the data collection focused on evaluating the outcomes and impact of the SVA Service Award across a large sample of students taking part in the programme, through an online survey. Section 3.2 focuses on how the survey data were collected and from whom; section 3.3 gives an overview of the key survey findings.

## 3.2. Data Collection

### 3.2.1. Survey Design

The survey questions were informed by the findings and themes of Phase 2. To maximise responses, the survey was short (7-10 minutes) and all who participated would go into a draw to win 1 of 20 SVA hoodies. The survey was designed in Google Forms and consisted of 5 sections:

1) Introduction: Purpose of research; possible publication of research
2) The basics: Name; school; year; email; consent to participation; whether or not they wanted to remain anonymous; whether they were also part of focus group
3) General questions about SVA Service Award participation: length of involvement; what they like about Programme; motivation to volunteer; have they used Summary of Service (if yes, what for); do they think they'll use it in future; what the most common way of finding volunteering projects is; whether finding volunteering projects is hard (if yes, what is hard); what SVA can do to make it easier; whether they prefer to volunteer alone or in a group
4) What they have learned: what skills they developed or practiced; in what ways volunteering has helped them; whether participation in the programme has helped them to feel more connected or involved with school and with their local community (if yes, what way); whether they have learned about social or economic issues in their community through volunteering (if yes, what); whether they made connections that could be useful for future (study or work) through volunteering with SVA (if yes, what kind)
5) Suggestions for the SVA: ideas or suggestions for the SVA; areas of improvement

The survey was a combination of multiple choice and open questions. A number of questions was made compulsory to ensure the key questions would be answered by all participants. The survey was sent out late November 2021 by the SVA to a comprehensive list of secondary students who were signed up for the SVA Service Award. A reminder was sent out a few days later.

### 3.2.2. Survey Responses

The SVA sent out a total of 13392 surveys. The opening rate was 37% and 5.8% clicked on the link to the survey. We received 333 responses. However, 10 of these responses selected to not be included in the research, a few responses were from school staff (careers advisor, teachers and a librarian) and 2 responses were from university students. There was also 1 double entry. This left 316 responses to analyse (2.3%). 13.5% of the respondents had also participated in the focus groups.

### *3.2.3. Insight into Students who Responded*

The following statistics give an insight into who the respondents were.

Distribution of responses per school year: The responses received were predominantly from year 12 and year 13 students. There was an equal distribution between year 12 and 13 students, and also between year 10 and 11 students.

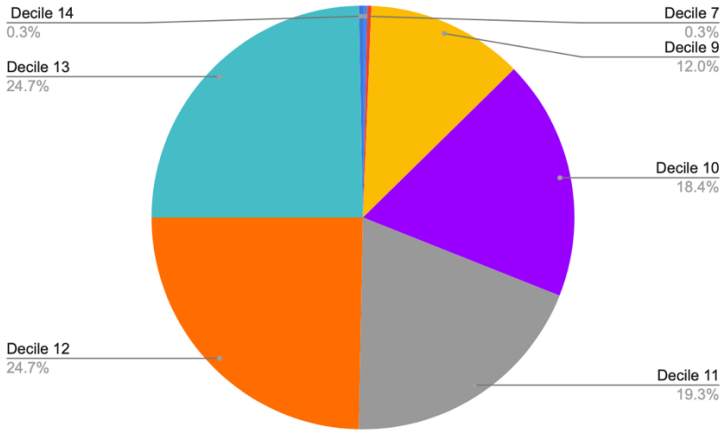



Figure 2: Distribution of responses per school year

Distribution of responses per school decile: Figure 3 shows the distribution of the responses received depending on the decile of the school the students attended.

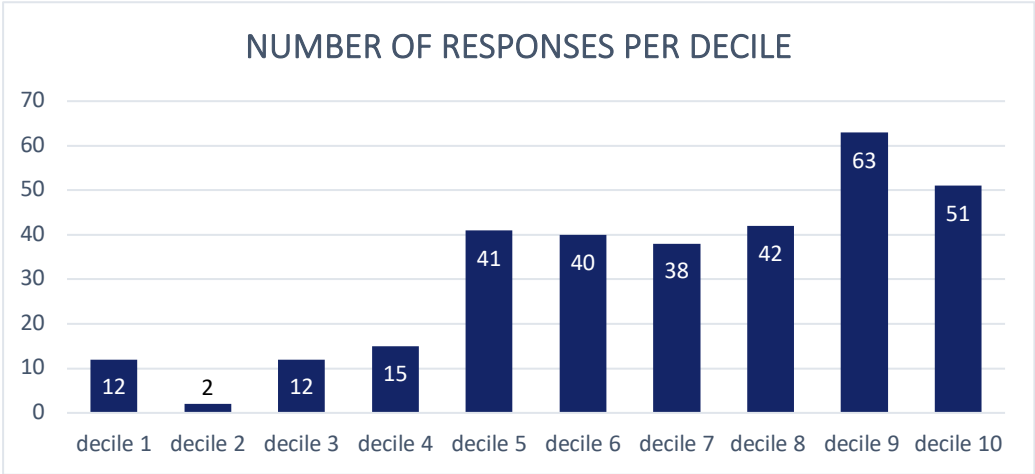



Figure 3: Distribution of responses over deciles

When grouping the responses in the two main decile groups we used throughout the research, low/medium decile (0-7) and higher decile (8-10), it is clear that half of the responses came from low/medium decile schools and half from higher decile schools. The vast majority of responses (75%) were from students from schools Decile 6 and up.

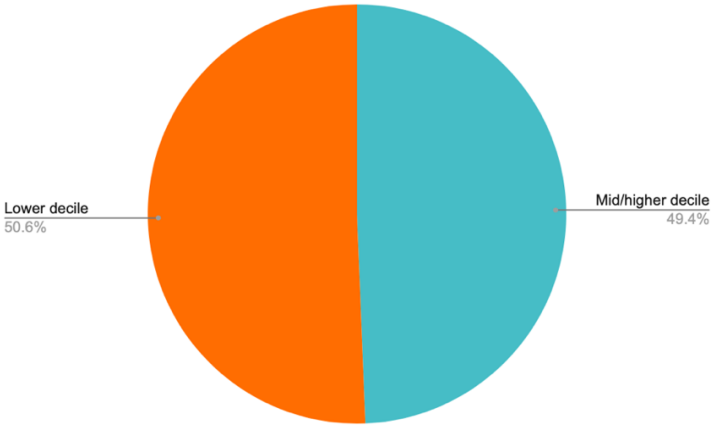



Figure 4: Distribution of responses per decile segment

Interestingly, compared to the focus groups, there appeared to be a more equal distribution between higher and lower/medium decile school responses. This could indicate that students from lower/medium decile schools feel more comfortable to fill out a survey than to be part of a focus group. To make more definitive statements about this would require further investigation into, for instance, the distribution of deciles among the students that the survey initially was sent to.

Distribution of responses per co-ed/single sex school: We did not ask students for their gender but figure 5 gives the distribution of responses based on whether the students came from schools that are co-ed or single sex. The number of responses from students from 'girls only' schools were greater than those from 'boys only' schools. Looking at the names of those who responded, it is clear that the vast majority of respondents was female.

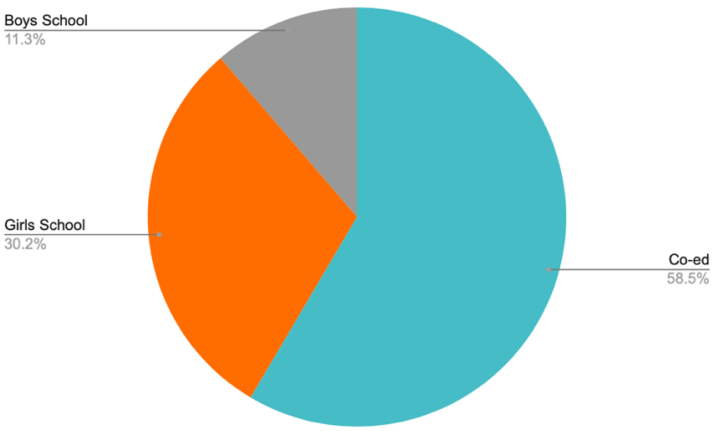



Figure 5: Distribution of responses over co-ed/single sex schools

Distribution of responses per private/public school: This was consistent with the national distribution of students between private and non-private schools (4% vs 96%).

Length of involvement with the programme: The responses came predominantly from students who have been involved with the programme for less than 2 years. Somewhat surprising was the relatively high percentage of students who had only been involved for less than a year. This could be a reflection of those students feeling more involved in, or

have enthusiasm for, the programme and were therefore more likely to respond. Or it could simply be a reflection of the distribution of 'years of involvement' among all participants in the SVA Programme.

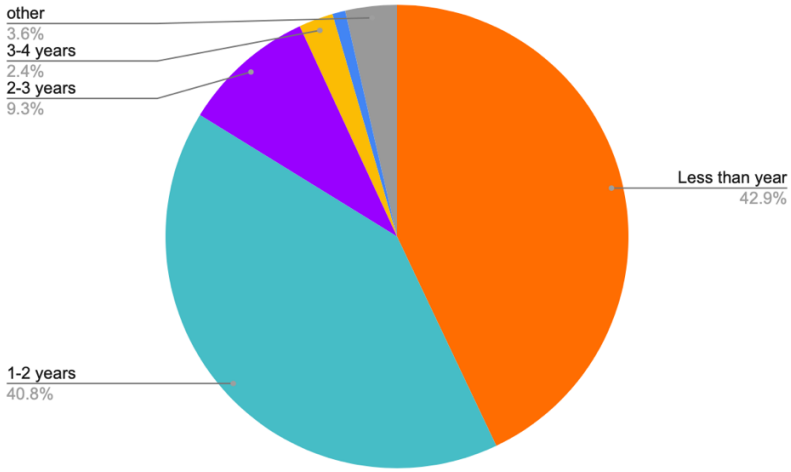



Figure 6: Years of involvement with SVA Programme

## 3.3. Survey Findings

The following sections provide an overview of the key findings from the survey. An analysis and deeper reflection on the findings will be presented in Chapter 4. I kept the summary notes relatively short, but the full survey findings have been shared with the SVA for reference.

### 3.3.1. Motivation to Volunteer

Students were asked what motivated them to volunteer and could choose pre-defined options or fill in their own. They could give multiple motivations.

It was striking to see that 91% of the students were motivated to volunteer by helping others. Giving back to community (80%) and making a contribution (66%) were also mentioned by the vast majority of students. Interestingly, these 'altruistic' motivations were mentioned by a higher percentage of the respondents than the more 'self-focused' or self-benefitting motivations such as developing skills (64.6 %) and good for CV (58.3 %).

| Motivation | % of total respondents |
|---|---|
| Helping others | 91 % |
| Giving back to community | 80 % |
| Making a contribution | 66 % |
| Develop my skills | 65 % |
| Good for my CV | 58 % |
| Meeting new people | 56 % |
| Prepares me for work or study | 47 % |
| Networking | 15 % |

### 3.3.2. What Students Like About the Programme

This was an open question and there was a wide variety of answers. A common answer among students was 'being able to help the community and others in need.' Many liked the 'reward' and 'recognition' they received for their service through the pins/badges, which they saw as 'getting something in exchange'. As one student said, "I like being able to help others but also to be recognised for it at the same time." The element of 'seeing one's progress' that the programme provides was often mentioned: "I like how it motivates me to do more good and to keep track of my progress." Some explicitly mentioned the competitive and performative element of reaching goals and badges. Students mentioned that it was 'fun' and a 'great way to try something new'. Some mentioned how it helped them to get out of their comfort zone. 'Developing new skills' and 'meeting new people' were also mentioned. Responses also included 'the ability to easily log hours' and students 'enjoying the app'.

### *3.3.3. Finding Volunteer Projects*

#### How Students Find Projects

Students were asked about the most common way they found volunteering projects. They could choose a pre-defined option or fill in their own. The most common response with 48% was that students look for projects themselves through their community, family or a club that they belonged to. About 34% found opportunities through school or teachers.

| How do you commonly find projects? | % of respondents |
|---|---|
| Look for project myself through community, family or club | 48 |
| Suggestions teacher or school | 34 |
| Through friends | 8 |
| Other | 10 |

Answers under 'other' included: SVA app, social media, church or 'other 'service groups they were part of. We also asked students whether they preferred to volunteer by

themselves or with others. About 55 % 'didn't mind either way', 40 % preferred to 'volunteer with others', and only 6 % preferred to 'volunteer alone'.

### Is Finding Projects Hard?

On whether they found it hard to find or organise projects, about 75% mentioned 'no' and a quarter 'yes'. It should be kept in mind, though, that the students who responded to the survey might not be representative of the whole student or SVA population, and that those who would answer or would think 'yes (finding projects is hard),' might not be part of the Programme or might not have responded to the survey.

We also had an open question asking to elaborate on the reasons why they found finding volunteering work difficult or found organising volunteering events hard. Some of the most common reasons mentioned were:

- *Finding people to help or getting people on board is hard*: "The organising part isn't so difficult, however incentivising people to get involved and volunteer their time and energy can be a challenge; it's actually something that the SVA award scheme helps with, as it allows people a chance to have their work recognised"
- *General lack of volunteering options*:
    - "Just not a heap of opportunities I can do because some are in school time"
    - "There's not enough [projects], but this has been because of Covid"
    - "I can't find the volunteering work that I can do easily/often"
    - "There isn't much available of my interest"
    - One student quite perceptively said, "People or organisations that actually need help are less likely to ask for it."
- *Challenge of finding projects for younger people*:
    - "It is hard to find a place where they will accept young teenagers who are below 16"
    - "Knowing where I can go to do volunteering or if I'm old enough"
- *Lack of local options*:
    - "Having to travel far to volunteer"
    - "It's hard to find a place where I can volunteer and there is no volunteer places or projects that's near my house"
    - "Sometimes it is difficult to find volunteering roles that are in my city and don't require a driver's license"
- *Lack of confidence*:
    - "Gathering confidence to participate"
    - "Finding what I'd like to volunteer for and having the confidence to go"
- *Lack of information on the listing*: "It can be difficult to determine the age group that the organiser is looking for (me being under 16)"
- *There isn't much encouragement to do it*

## 3.3.4. The Impact of Volunteering on Students' Lives

The survey gave an in-depth insight into how profoundly volunteering in general, and the programme specifically, positively impacts on students' lives.

## Students' Skills

We asked "What skills have you developed or practiced during volunteering?". Students could choose pre-defined options or fill in their own. They could give multiple answers.

A staggering 80% felt that their communication skills had improved and a similarly high percentage mentioned an improvement in leadership skills and interpersonal skills (75% each). An improvement in time management, organising and problem solving skills were also mentioned by the vast majority.

| Skills Developed | % of respondents |
|---|---|
| Communication | 80 |
| Leadership skills | 75 |
| Interpersonal and social skills | 75 |
| Time management | 67 |
| Organising skills | 66 |
| Problem solving | 63 |
| Public speaking | 34 |

## How Students Feel About Themselves

To gain insight into the impact of volunteering on how students see or feel about themselves, we asked them to complete the sentence "Volunteering has helped me ... ." They could select from pre-defined options or fill in their own. They could choose multiple answers.

| Impact on students | % of respondents |
|---|---|
| Feel useful to others | 81 |
| Feel good about myself | 71 |
| Proud of myself | 68 |
| Feel more confident | 66 |
| Feel more capable, more able to do things | 65 |
| Feel more recognised or seen within my school or community | 53 |
| Have more self-belief | 45 |

The impact on how students feel about themselves is quite astounding. For 81% of students, volunteering made them feel useful to others. And for the vast majority of students volunteering made them feel good (71%), and proud (68%) of themselves. For teenagers in particular, who often struggle with feelings of self-worth, these are feelings and emotions of significance and are inherently connected to wellbeing (more about this in Chapter 4). They also reported feeling more confident (66%) and capable (65%), both important elements to feel ready for work, study and for being a useful member of society in general.

## Connection With School and Community

*Impact of the SVA programme on connection with school*: For 63% of the respondents, engaging in the SVA Service Award programme meant that they felt more involved with, or connected to, school. 20% were uncertain about an increased sense of connection.

*Impact on community connection*: Another striking impact of high school volunteering is that 67% feels an increased sense of connection with their community. In terms of 'in what way' they felt more connected to their local community, a common answer revolved around meeting new people and in particular people they may not otherwise interact with. This related to people who they volunteer with, but also who they volunteer 'for'. One student explained, "I've met so many people who I wouldn't have met if I didn't get involved. I've made many new connections with fellow students, teachers, and those who I've helped in the wider community …. and so much more!" Similarly, another student said, "It brings people of all walks of life together, the young and the old, the 'rich' and the 'poor'. Those are the people who truly care about our community, being able to take time out their day to do an act of selflessness, which has brought not only me but all others a lot closer to those in the community surrounding them."

As also became clear in the focus groups, it is in meeting others that students start to see not just differences but also the similarities with people who they might otherwise not have interacted with: "I have met so many people that tell me little things about their lives and it's an amazing thing that I know that they are going about living their day-to-day life at the same time as me." This is an important aspect of feeling 'oneness' and empathy for people within one's community.

A few also reflected on being more known within the community, which felt important to them and made the feel a more integral part of their community: "[Volunteering] made me feel like more people would know me now and that I was finally giving back to the community where I have lived for so long." Or, "it has allowed me to be recognised as a reliable person in my community."

*Impact on understanding community issues and needs*: We also asked whether they felt their understanding of social or economic issues in their community had increased as a result of volunteering. Some students said, "I feel more connected by getting to know those I am helping and understanding their lives" or "through volunteering, I am able to understand more of the problems that people in my community face." But the majority was unsure about whether they understood community issues and needs better (40%), 30% said 'no' and only 31% said 'yes'.

This lack of learning about community issues (community understanding), is a lost opportunity. More specifically, we would hope that students gain a better idea of what is happening on a social and economic level within their community as they volunteer. This lack of understanding gained could be a reflection of not being exposed to community issues when volunteering or of the type of projects the students are involved with - e.g. babysitting might not expose the student to socio-economic issues in their community. Perhaps more likely, is that this lack of learning is the result of a lack of reflection that happens during and after the volunteering. In particular the kind of reflection that looks at, 'what are the kinds of problems people in my community face?', 'what needs is my volunteering addressing?', and 'what is the wider context in which those needs have arisen' (more on this in the next chapter).

We dove a little further into this by asking students who answered 'yes', what they had learned about the social/economic issues in their community. A common response from the participants was that their eyes were opened to economic and social challenges in New Zealand. Students wrote things like:

- "I learnt that there are a lot more people that don't have food or a roof over their heads"
- "How incredibly tough it is to keep on top of all your bills with grocery, phone plans, rent ... To gather that much money each and every week can really be a struggle"
- "I volunteered to help children at a low decile primary school with their art projects. It was very revealing about the financial state of certain learning institutions. I thought this was really sad because a lot of the children could not do as much of their art projects as they wanted to budget wise. Economic differences should not impact the quality of anyone's education and yet it unfortunately does"
- "About how expensive things are on a minimum wage"
- "That poverty is rife in our community and that there are plenty of people who are struggling financially"
- "Poverty in different aspects (period poverty, labour exploitation, etc), elder neglect"
- "I've learnt that there are loads more people with mental health issues and disabilities in my community than I realised"
- "I've learnt about the different services that are and aren't available to people who are struggling and it is eye-opening to the sheer amount of people in need, but it also gives me hope for the future because I've learnt how many people want to help"

Some also related this explicitly to the social and economic divide in New Zealand society, and have come to realise their privilege:

- "I learnt how even in my community there is an economic divide, I noticed this when I volunteered at the Salvation Army."
- "I've learned that there are many people who are less fortunate than I am. Before, I was like a lot of others that didn't know there was such a divide between 'well off' and 'less fortunate' people and how hard that is for some individuals and families. I donated every now and then but I didn't do much to change the problem other than that. Now that I have gotten involved with people who are trying to change these issues, I've really learned a lot about how uneducated I had been before. I now realise that things like homelessness and the health system divide is much more prominent then I ever would've thought"
- "I learnt that not everyone gets the same opportunities as me and it really opened my eyes to how lucky I am"
- "It was so surprising to me that there are some year 5/6 kids (boys in particular) who cannot read at all. It has made me reconsider how lucky I am and shows me that I have to volunteer so I can help as much I can"

Some noted their increased understanding about environmental and/or waste issues:

- "I've learnt about the amount of rubbish you can find on beaches and how you don't need to look hard to find harmful things near you"
- "I learned that a lot of people are wasting good things that can be reused"

Understanding their privilege and their ability to help others motivated them to continue volunteering now, and in the future. But also, it seemed to 'teach' them more patience, empathy and compassion.

The answers to this question made it obvious how significantly the social and economic understanding of young people can shift as a result of volunteering. And how, for some, the systemic nature of societal issues became clear to them. In particular for those who might come from a relatively sheltered upbringing without much knowledge of those who really struggle in NZ, this can have a large impact in their 'pro-social identity development' and future social consciousness and civic engagement. As Angus, the SVA intern assisting with the survey report, wrote "The more people we can get involved [with volunteering], the more people will have these experiences and the better off the New Zealand community will be."

#### Impact on social capital & future opportunities

When we asked students whether they had made contacts or connections through volunteering with the SVA that they thought would be useful for their future (study or work), 30% said 'yes', 33% answered 'no', 37% was unsure. The numbers of those who said 'no' or who were unsure, seemed high. These numbers could highlight that students who responded are young or at the start of their volunteering 'career.' It could also mean that they are simply not quite aware of how volunteering can assist in finding future opportunities, and growing their network[6] and social capital. Given how important social capital and networking are in career development, it could be valuable to educate students on the benefits of networking and the importance of making connections for their future. For instance, this could involve providing examples of how other volunteers found work opportunities or leveraged the connections they made when volunteering for their career. In addition, tips on 'how to' network or be intentional about choosing volunteering projects could be useful.

### 3.3.5. Summary of Service

We also asked if students had used the Summary of Service yet. 54% planned to use it in the future, 43% was unsure whether they would, and 20% of the respondents had already used it. Some had used it for themselves, to "get an idea of where I am at." Others had used it for:

- University applications
- University halls applications
- Scholarships applications
- Award applications
- Girl Guide community badges
- CV & job applications
- Leadership role applications

[6] Note: When we asked about what motivated people to volunteer, very few were motivated by creating networking opportunities (15 %).

The high number of people who were unsure about whether they will use the Summary of Service in the future might indicate that education of where/how a Summary of Service can be used is needed.

### 3.3.6. Survey Learnings

The survey provided rich data about student volunteers, their experiences, the impact of the programme and also areas for improvement. It was interesting to see that the survey findings confirmed and deepened many of the understandings gained through the focus groups, which created confidence in the observations and findings of Phase 2.

As mentioned, the survey received a similar percentage of responses from students from higher (8 +) decile schools and students from lower/medium (0-7) decile schools. This was particularly striking when compared to the unequal distribution of those who participated in the focus groups. This could mean that surveys are a good way to communicate with students from lower/medium decile schools. However, as surveys engender less rich data, getting lower decile students engaged in focus groups will still be important.

What would be good for a next survey, is to consider asking students for their gender and ethnicity. That would allow for further analysis of the data, and to create a better understanding of which voices the SVA is hearing (and missing) when it is collecting data through its focus groups or surveys.

# Phase 4:

# Conclusions: Current Impact and Pathways to Improvement

## 4.1. Overview

The aim of Phase 4 was to analyse all the data collected and draw conclusions in relation to the questions that drove this research. In particular, the impact of volunteering on young people's lives, the benefits of the SVA Service Award programme, and the ways in which the SVA can serve students better. This analysis took place over December 2021 and January 2022, and was done by Puck Algera with contributions from facilitators Josephine Varghese and Monica Fa'asu.

The next sections discuss the observations and themes arising from this analysis. They provide the SVA Foundation with both strategic and practical insights to not only continue to create impact for young people but also to widen and deepen this impact.

The first two sections (4.2. and 4.3) provide the basis for this discussion and reflect on students' motivations and the impact on their lives in more depth. The next few sections, 4.4. to 4.7 then dive further into the areas where the SVA can improve or leverage its impact and they highlight important strategic considerations. Section 4.8 talks to the need to create an impact hierarchy, and section 4.9 summarises key practical pathways to improvement mentioned throughout the research. 4.10 offers a number of areas of future research, and 4.11 offers a few concluding comments.

## 4.2. Students' Motivations

When looking at the motivation to volunteer, both the focus groups and the survey results showed that 'altruistic' motivations like 'helping others' and 'giving back to community' were mentioned by more participants than self-focused motivations like, for instance, 'developing skills' or 'growing my network.' From the focus group responses in particular, it became clear that 'helping others' or 'giving back' engendered positive feelings in students, like joy and satisfaction.

What stood out in this respect was that students in the focus groups expressed motivations which were predominately 'intrinsic,' meaning that they engage in volunteering because it is personally rewarding to them (e.g. 'makes me feel good,' 'seeing impact of my helping'). Existing research shows that intrinsic motivation is a good indicator of ongoing involvement. This as opposed to 'extrinsic' motivations, which means engaging in a task or behaviour to avoid punishment or to get an external reward (Sennett, 2021). Extrinsic motivations were more clearly represented in the survey responses, as reflected in students being motivated by the 'reward' and 'recognition' they received through the pins and badges. While the data do not lend itself to a straight comparison between the focus group and the survey participants, it does suggest that the motivation to participation is not the same for everyone. It could also suggest, perhaps unsurprisingly, that those who said 'yes' to focus group engagement were the already more engaged and intrinsically motivated students.

This understanding of motivations can inform how SVA frames its messaging around the programme if it wants to get more students involved and keep them involved. Messaging around how personally rewarding volunteering is would likely appeal to those intrinsically motivated, and messaging related to what external rewards can be gained, may appeal to those more extrinsically motivated. To keep the latter group engaged, it might be worth considering to lessen the gap between awards (so more awards can be gained), and perhaps adding awards for different categories.

### Awareness of Benefits and Intentionality

Among the students who participated in the focus groups, there appeared to be a difference in the awareness of the benefits of volunteering, and in the intentionality to engage in volunteering to gain those benefits. Some students were very aware of what volunteering would bring them, in particular in terms of developing career related skills and gaining social capital. Gaining these benefits motivated them and they were intentional in choosing projects that would assist them in gaining those benefits. Other students struggled to recognise how their skills or attitude to self had changed through volunteering. They seemed more motivated by a desire to help the community and less intentional about skill development. While the sample was too small to be conclusive, it seemed that participants from higher decile engaged schools (and those who had been volunteering for years), were aware of the (career related) benefits of it, whilst the students from rural, lower decile schools were less aware.

There is value in creating more awareness around the practical benefits of volunteering and helping students to be intentional about gaining such benefits for themselves. In particular for those who lack certain skills, have less social capital and could benefit from upward social mobility, or are less confident to start with. In addition, these insights might encourage students who are unsure of 'why they should give their time for free' to volunteer.

## 4.3. Volunteering Positively Impacts Students' Lives

The findings clearly show the incredible benefits of youth volunteering in a range of outcome areas: from practical skill development to feeling more capable and work ready; from feeling more confident to being recognised and seen by others; from having a sense of belonging at school to having a greater understanding of community needs; from gaining social capital to expanding social networks. Many of these benefits were also described in the literature review in Chapter 1. Most of this existing academic research, however, is focused on university age students, on service learning (instead of 'generic' volunteering) and was predominantly focused on North American students. Given the lack of research on high school volunteering, and the absence of New Zealand based research, the findings of this research can make an important contribution to the existing academic and practical literature, both in New Zealand and globally.

Without repeating all the outcome and impact areas here, I want to highlight some of the findings that stood out. It was clear how many students had improved a wide range of practical skills as a result of volunteering and felt more work-ready as a result. In particular the number of students who felt that their social, communication and interpersonal skills had improved was staggering (75% and up).

The positive association between volunteering and how students feel about themselves was particularly poignant and touching. Like how the vast majority felt much more confident and more capable as a result of volunteering. The improvements that shy and introverted students (and quite a few self-identified as such) reported in terms of their confidence, and social and interpersonal skills as a result of volunteering were incredible. A related important finding was that the programme helps students become less isolated. Shy and introverted students may be 'homebodies' without extensive social connections. The programme benefits these students by becoming more aware of, and engaged with, the world around them. These benefits were also highlighted by students with an immigrant background and those new to New Zealand society. Volunteering gave them an opportunity

to become more confident in the English language, make connections and become acquainted with the New Zealand culture. These are outcome areas not generally mentioned in the literature.

The impact of celebrating volunteering achievements through the awards on those who do not generally stand out (academically or in sports) was significant. An interesting insight from the study was that this celebration of success provides an 'antidote' to the negative self-talk young people often engage in; such negative self-talk predicts loneliness and is related to low self-esteem (Ford, 2015). In addition, the celebration of success assists students not to be whakamā [7] (broad translation: shameful) about standing out and owning their work and service in the community. A finding quite relevant for New Zealand society in particular, where owning one's achievements and speaking well about oneself is not always supported.

While we did not ask students explicitly about the impact on their psychological health and wellbeing (as this impact is often indirect and hard to define), the findings did confirm that volunteering made students feel good (71%), proud of themselves and more connected to their community and others (belonging). All these are positive emotional experiences and factors that are linked with psychological health and wellbeing (e.g. Fleming, Merry, Robinson, Denny, & Watson, 2007; Jasperse, Ward, & Jose, 2012). The students also reported feeling more flexible and resilient as a result of their volunteering experience; studies show that young people who are resilient demonstrate positive adaptation and are more likely to develop into healthy and competent adults, despite exposure to risks (Fleming et al., 2007).

The importance of these improvements in mental wellbeing and the attitude towards self cannot be underestimated. They are highly relevant for adolescents, a group that often struggles with a lack of confidence, self-worth and self-appreciation, and even depression and suicidal thoughts (Denny, Fleming, Clark, & Wall, 2004). This is relevant in the New Zealand context, where poor mental in rangatahi has doubled in the last 10 years and is expected to worsen, not in the last place due to the impacts of Covid19 on youth mental health, which is expected to be extensive and enduring (Foon, 2020).

What further stood out from the data, and which is not discussed in the existing literature, is the desire of students to make a difference but that they lack an outlet for this desire as young adults. Even more so, some explicitly said felt that teenagers have a 'bad rep' for being self-focused and that their wish to be helpful and of use is not always seen and acknowledged. Being able to volunteer through the SVA gave them an avenue to make a contribution, and a staggering 81% of the students in the survey said that it made them feel useful to others.

The closer connection experienced with the local community (67% in the survey) also stood out as an important outcome of volunteering. And while this was not expressed by everyone, volunteering really opened young people's eyes to community or social needs, and the economic divide. The findings spoke of a deepened understanding of own privilege (and how that can be used). These realisations are particularly important as these are 'emerging adults' who are in the process of developing their identity. According to the

[7] Whakamā is a New Zealand Maori concept which does not have any exact equivalent in English, although shame, feeling inferior, inadequate and with self-doubt, shyness, excessive modesty and withdrawal describe aspects of the concept (Sachdev, 1990; "Whakamā," 2022).

literature, developing a ‘pro-social’ identity can be an indication of future civic and community involvement, adult voting and a service orientated career (Kahne et al., 2013; Yates & Youniss, 1996).

In concluding this section, it is clear that the SVA Service Award programme raises the visibility around youth volunteering and normalises it. Not only that, but the programme makes it accessible and fun for young people to engage with volunteering through the app and the awards. And by doing so, the programme creates avenues through which these positive outcomes and impact of volunteering can be developed and experienced. At the same time, the research also shows that these outcomes and impact may not be experienced by those who may need them most; this will be discussed in the next sections (4.4. and 4.5).

## 4.4. Limits to Inclusivity

The research shows that the SVA Service Award programme is, in many ways, inclusive. It appeals to a wide range of students: students from various ages, a variety of backgrounds and different decile schools. Anyone can join: students don’t need to have a special talent or excel academically. The fact that a broad range of activities can count as volunteering also speaks to the inclusivity of programme. The experience of students with less visibility within the traditional school system, or from migrant families, indicates that volunteering can also play a role in bringing marginalised students into the mainstream. Its egalitarian nature is reflected in the fact that ten hours of volunteering at a local, low decile school is worth the same as ten hours at a private or high decile school. The non-prescriptive nature of what volunteering is, which allows for definitions that are sensitive to school, culture or location, was also noted as contributing to the programme being inclusive and egalitarian.

At the same time, the research highlights practical issues with the inclusivity of the programme. In particular, certain students face barriers to participation and not all schools have the resources to support the programme.

In terms of the barriers to participation, the findings show that not everyone has equal access to suitable volunteering options. The programme is not inclusive for young high school students, with very few volunteer options for people younger than 16. Options for those who do not have a means of transport (e.g. when both parents work, family does not own car or students do not have driver's license) are limited too. Students with a physical disability are excluded from participation because most volunteering options require students to be mobile and physically able. Also, students who live in rural areas find it harder to participate because the lack of locally available projects. In addition, the findings show that students who naturally have less confidence, are shy, or simply have less experience in volunteering, find it harder to participate in the programme. The low touch, student-led model might not work for them because it requires a level of confidence and initiative that they do not (yet) have. This would be further complicated if they are attending an uninvolved school, which gives very little guidance and support.

The second issue relates to some schools having limited time and resources available to support the programme. As teacher Bea highlighted, the programme wants to be inclusive but this is not a practical reality because there are disparities in the support that the schools can offer. The schools may be less resourced, have internal struggles, or are primarily focused on ‘just’ getting students through the day and to pass. Even though the programme is primarily student-led, it was clear that for students from highly engaged

schools participation was much easier than for those from not engaged schools: it is pushed through the curriculum, they are praised for it, volunteering is cool, they are given volunteer options and other support. Those who came from less involved schools needed quite a bit more initiative, independence, confidence and determination to get things going and to stay involved.

In summary, the findings highlight that the SVA service award programme has great potential to be inclusive and be egalitarian, but it isn't quite yet.

## 4.5. Levelling the Playing Field

What the sections above show is that while the SVA Service Award programme creates incredible benefits for students through the experience of volunteering, it seems that not all students have equal access to these benefits, or get the same outcomes and impact from volunteering. In fact, adolescents who have the most need for benefits like increased confidence, social capital and upward social mobility, leadership and communication skills, might face higher barriers in participating in the programme. For example, a student in a rural area, who feels isolated and has low self-belief, would really benefit from expanding her social connections and social capital through volunteering beyond the local community, but has no access to projects. A student from a lower decile, less-involved school may not experience the positive impact of gaining social worth and pride when volunteering to the same extent as those in higher decile, better resourced schools. They may also not experience an increased sense of belonging at school or improved connection to teachers.

Whether students are from a lower decile school with limited resources to support the programme, whether they have physical limitations to get to or participate in volunteering, whether they come from socio-economic realities which require them to work for a wage instead of volunteer, these students are further disadvantaged because participation in the programme is more challenging for them. Social and economic inequalities are interconnected. There is a clear chasm between the resources and opportunities available for students in affluent schools vis-à-vis those in poorer areas. For example, when looking at who gets into New Zealand universities, data sourced from six universities in a 2018 Weekend Herald investigation shows that "60 per cent of the almost 16,000 students accepted into professional law, medicine and engineering in the past five years came from the richest third of homes, just 6 per cent came from the poorest third" (Johnston, 2018, Par. 10). The University of Canterbury took only "a single decile one entrant - out of more than 2000 - into its engineering programme in five years. At the same time, it took more than 500 decile 10 students" (Johnston, 2018, Par. 3). This pattern manifests beyond the area of higher education, and is visible in volunteering too.

Through the SVA Service Award programme the SVA Foundation has the potential to play an important role in levelling the playing field for young people in New Zealand, by improving prospects for students from lower decile schools or disadvantaged backgrounds. It can do this by lowering the barriers to participation for those with access issues, and by offering additional support and resources for less advantaged schools or students.

The exact nature of this support will in part depend on whose needs the SVA decides to prioritise. The practical support required to support rural students in gaining social capital and having more equal opportunities after high school, for instance, will be quite different from the support needed to make the programme more inclusive for Maori or migrant

students. In other words, if the SVA Foundation wants to play an active role in levelling the playing field, some strategic choices need to be made around what impact they want to achieve most and for whom. A key element of those deliberations might focus on where it can have the most impact with its existing resources.

## 4.6. Deepening Impact through Reflection

"We do not learn from experience... we learn from reflecting on experience" — John Dewey

Another lever to deepen the impact of volunteering is making reflective processes an integral part of the programme. The research findings show strong support for the suggestion in the volunteering literature (section 1.2) that the quality of the volunteering experience is not only related to the number of hours spent volunteering but also whether reflection takes place on the volunteering experience. As mentioned in 1.2, in particular reflective discussions with student peers and with teacher guidance, which include a critical analysis of the social issues faced during volunteering is important in creating outcomes like an increased sense of self-efficacy, awareness of personal values and social engagement.

On the one hand, the research showed the power of collaborative reflection during the focus group sessions. The focus groups (unintentionally) became a vehicle to help students make sense of their experiences. As students shared experiences with each other, guided by the questions of the facilitator, they deepened their self-knowledge in relation to the skills they had developed, the ways they had grown, and how they had felt as a result of volunteering. But also, in some focus groups, the reflective discussions allowed students to deepen their understanding of the needs and challenges in the community around them, what role they could play and what may be more or less effective ways of helping. (Some students explicitly valued this element of the focus group experience and found it enlightening. One student said: "Thank you, because it's a great opportunity and a great source of self-realisation. Just being connected with our community, our kaupapa, our whanau. It has helped me a lot in growing as a person. Thank you to the [SVA] for pushing me.")

On the other hand, the research also showed that without guided or collaborative reflection, some of the important benefits of volunteering might not be realised. This was particularly evident for the potential 'social outcomes' of volunteering, which relate to volunteers becoming more aware of societal and political issues, and their own role in social change. As discussed in section 3.3.4, only a third of the survey respondents reported having gained a better understanding of the needs in their community through volunteering. And as mentioned, this lack of learning about community issues, is a lost opportunity. Volunteering can educate students to become concerned and involved citizens, but that cannot happen without a reflection on the wider context in which the helping takes place.

While throughout the research the value of reflection was recognised by both teachers and students, all said that there is too little space and time to reflect on the volunteering experience. The teachers mentioned that reflection with students was minimal and they would love some help with it. They mentioned time as the biggest hurdle. By encouraging and supporting reflective processes, SVA could improve and deepen its impact. In particular if it seeks to help develop the socially conscious leaders of tomorrow.

There are various avenues through which the SVA could encourage and support reflection as part of the SVA Service Award programme. One would be for the SVA to organise regular focus groups with students themselves. Another, likely more effective, avenue would be to offer instructions and resources to teachers, which detail how to hold effective reflective sessions. These could potentially also include subject specific content and material on the UNSDGs or the Treasury's Living Standards Framework. The latter might be more relevant as it highlights the wider indigenous and cultural context relevant to New Zealand's society. It will not be enough to incorporate the reflection only in the SVA app; for effective reflection and learning, teacher guidance and interaction with others will be key.

In concluding this section, without going into too much detail of what such sessions should entail, it is important that reflective sessions focus on multiple levels:

- Personal level: E.g. How has the volunteering experience impacted the student as a person? What are the student's values?
- Beneficiary level: E.g. Who is the beneficiary and how are they impacted by the volunteering?
- Systems level: What is the greater social and political context that creates the issues experienced by the beneficiary? What is the student's role in this wider context?

The next section will provide a deeper reflection on this.

## 4.7. Critical Reflections on Volunteering

The findings show that most students have a relatively unidirectional or unilateral understanding of volunteering: 'I (the giver) give my time to help you (the needy)' (see 2.3.3). Volunteering in this understanding is based on the idea of 'helping,' 'generosity' and 'charity, rather than coming from a sense of solidarity with the beneficiary. While this is a relatively standard definition of volunteering, from a critical scholarship perspective on volunteering, there are significant issues with understanding volunteering in this way.

Scholars as well as practitioners point out that volunteering can come from, and further engender, a 'saviour complex' (Clark, 2017). Hu explains that "the 'white savior complex'[8] is ultimately the result of ignorance and a pursuit of fulfilment [and self-satisfaction] at the expense of others. It also reflects a common motif among volunteers [who] simply participate in service projects because 'it's the right thing to do' without taking the time to understand why" (2019, Par. 7)[9]. A saviour complex approach is problematic and potentially damaging when volunteers do not reflect on whether their actions have made an actual positive impact; the socio-economic conditions that necessitated assistance (see postcolonial scholarship, for example); and also whether they themselves have (disproportionately) benefited from doing the activity (Hu, 2019).

[8] It is important to note that, although historically 'white saviour' is an important concept to understand colonialism and neo-colonialism, people regardless of their race can subscribe to a 'saviour' mentality.

[9] In recent years this issue has gained much attention in the context of 'voluntourism,' when people take overseas trips to engage in short term volunteering activities (Cho, 2020; Clark, 2017). Several participants mentioned wanting to engage in 'voluntourism' when travel restrictions would lift.

There is a wealth of literature critiquing some of the common understandings about volunteering, like:

- Volunteering is always helpful for those at the receiving end: This needn't necessarily be the case. 'The road to hell is paved with good intentions,' as many recent cases of 'helping' by humanitarian aid agencies, large NGOs and businesses have shown (e.g. Singh, 2015; Taub, 2015). For instance, hundreds of thousands of malaria nets provided to poor African communities did not end up over beds, but are used to fish instead. Mosquito-net fishing is a growing problem and an unintended consequence of one of the largest and most celebrated public health campaigns in recent years (Gettleman, 2015). One of the factors that influenced this debacle was the lack of understanding of the needs of the beneficiaries (in the case above, hunger was a more pressing problem than becoming sick from malaria).
- It is enough to be 'generous' and to give one's time: It is not. Certain types of volunteering may be sensitive and require particular skills, and cultural competence. It is important to make sure that volunteers understand this, and that they are imparted the necessary skills and strategies to do a task effectively.
- Those who volunteer have a moral high ground over those who don't: One participant said in the focus group meeting "I think some people just don't get why anyone would give their time without pay." But students from backgrounds of socio-economic stress might not be able to afford to volunteer. It is important to be aware that volunteering might not be accessible to all, and that it may be a privileged activity.
- Understanding and minimising power imbalances: When people seek help, there is often a power imbalance between those providing services and those receiving them. There are instances where charity organisations have taken advantage of these power imbalances in detrimental ways for the service users (e.g. Gayle, 2018). And within an individualistic culture where poverty is seen as a personal failure (rather than a structural or systemic issue), shame can also be involved. Focus Group 1 students reflected on this and discussed a scenario where this power imbalance was minimised: The Kickstart Breakfast programme was accessible to all regardless of whether they were facing food insecurity or not, removing the element of shame when accessing the service.
- Volunteering solves problems for people: It important to not confuse an instance of helping with providing structural or systemic solutions. Volunteers need to think about what historical and contemporary social-political processes led to people/communities/nations being disproportionately poor or disproportionately affected by disasters, and ask the question: How can such issues be systemically addressed? What is my role in this? Do I support systemic change/policies that would improve the condition of those I serve? (e.g. Harman et al., 2021; Hickey, 2021)).

In a world where decolonisation and awareness of privilege are gaining increasing attention, such critical reflections on volunteering are not a luxury. Deepening the understanding of students' privilege, of power differences and of how inequality came to be is are an area in which the SVA Service Award Programme can potentially make an important contribution. In particular for those students who come from more privileged backgrounds and higher decile schools.

SVA could be a force for change by supporting a shift away from traditional notions of volunteering.

Through the programme directly, or through resources provided to schools, students could be given the opportunity to dismantle the dominant, individualistic narratives about poverty and prosperity and reflect on how inequalities came to be and what they can do to systemically address them. They could be offered alternative frameworks for helping, which might focus on participatory and indigenous approaches. There are a plethora of existing resources that provide a deeper pedagogical understanding of the differences between traditional approaches to volunteering and service learning, and critical approaches (e.g. F. Martin & Pirbhai-Illich, 2015). As F. Martin and Pirbhai-Illich (2015) explain: "Critical service-learning is envisioned as a politicised and social justice oriented pedagogical practice that not only attempts to meet the needs of a particular community but also ...embraces the political nature of service and seeks social justice over more traditional views of citizenship'. Thus it becomes 'a problem- solving instrument of social and political reform … resulting in a more complex politicised project that attempts to raise critical consciousness, self-reflexivity and engagement in advocacy for social and civic transformation" (p.136).

## 4.8. Impact Hierarchy & Measurement

While the SVA's initial focus with the SVA Service Award was to get as many students and schools onto the programme as possible (go wide, low touch), the conversations with SVA highlighted other areas of strategic interest, like deepening the impact on young people's lives, but also the desire to provide a social infrastructure for teachers.

The sections in this chapter highlight potential avenues for the SVA Foundation to increase or widen its impact. The SVA has done considerable work on the development of a clear purpose, impact areas and strategy, but additional reflections on what are the most important areas of impact (hierarchy of impact goals) are important.

### Selecting Indicators: Measure What Matters Most

An impact measurement framework for the SVA, which includes selecting outcome and impact indicators, will be determined by the strategic decisions mentioned. After all, we want a lean impact measurement strategy, where each measurement point is clearly related to an intended and important area of impact.

For any purpose or impact-driven organisation, outcome and impact focused measurement indicators have to be an integral part (rather than an add-on) of the overall performance management framework and treated similarly to more traditional KPIs. Historically, measurement systems focus on activity or output measures. While these indicators are useful, when it comes to impact measurement the emphasis is on including indicators that measure (by proxy) the long-term outcomes of activities for beneficiaries. We look to identify outcome and impact indicators where possible, and supplement these with activity/output indicators where there is a clear causal link. Further work on this is advised.

## 4.9. Practical Pathways to Improvement

The following sections highlight some of the main suggestions made throughout the research in relation to improving the awareness of the programme, and improving support for students and teachers. This is not an exhaustive summary. I recommend referring to the findings sections 1.3, 2.3, 3.3 and the appendices for the details of, and context to, these suggestions.

### 4.9.1. Creating Awareness & Getting Students Involved

The research provides a number of suggestions about how to create more visibility for the programme, as many indicated this was lacking. A few recurring suggestions were:

- SVA to make more information available on: What the SVA is, its purpose and details of the programme
- School visits from SVA representatives (Service Award students, tertiary students, staff) to talk to the student community
- SVA to create more awareness of what volunteering is and its benefits for students (e.g. volunteer awareness month; 'success' stories' emphasising e.g. increase in confidence, social capital, work opportunities)
- Supporting senior students to be role models to encourage in particular younger students to become part of the programme
- Kickstart student interest through a large event, organised or supported by the SVA
- SVA to have increased social media presence

### 4.9.2. Support for Students

The two main areas which students sought support for, related to finding projects and to building community and connections:

*Finding Projects*

A few recurring suggestions were:

- Basic information on how to start volunteering or find projects for those less experienced
- Give examples of how to volunteer in your community and ideas of things you can do (inspiration). Through SVA app, newsletter or visits from SVA or other volunteers
- Create a shortlist of projects that can be done in most communities, including instructions (who, what, where). E.g. breakfast club, beach/river cleaning, appy hour (teaching older generation how to use digital applications)
- Guidance of what to think about when reaching out to people in your community who might need help (how to be sensitive, not patronising)
- More local/rural volunteering options on SVA app and website
- Contact information of organisations students could potentially volunteer with in their region
- Provide suggestions for volunteer projects that are inclusive and cater to a larger part of the student population (e.g. young people, those with physical restrictions)
- More detailed descriptions about projects (and UNSDGs) on the app

### Building Community and Connections

Students expressed a deep need to be connected with other students participating in the programme, and to feel more connected and affiliated with the wider SVA. The value of this was discussed in earlier sections but relates to reducing isolation (e.g. rural schools), building networks and social capital, and becoming inspired by each other.

- SVA to visit schools to talk at assembly
- SVA to help forge links between participating schools across New Zealand, so students can connect with other students
- Use social media (campaigns), or a newsletter, to create visibility of participating students and their projects across New Zealand, e.g. get students to share their favourite projects
- Use social media or (a new) app to allow for those involved with the SVA Service Award to have an open dialogue and interact (e.g. students, leaders, teachers)
- Facilitate building connections across various geographical/socio-economic/cultural backgrounds through, for instance, students from different schools (mix of rural-urban, high - low decile) doing projects, reflection or workshops together. Or just to exchange ideas
- Closer connection between secondary students and (tertiary) SVA clubs focused on sharing information. E.g. through visits, mentoring relationships, holiday camps
- Every so many years SVA (or SVA club) come to schools to lead an activity (and show students how to do it), like tree planting or disaster response.

## 4.9.3. Support for Schools and Teachers

The role of teachers and schools in creating active engagement with the programme was undisputed. The school has the power to drive the momentum of the programme, by integrating it within the curriculum and by creating enthusiasm among teachers and students by showing the benefits of volunteering. Schools can help make volunteering 'cool' by celebrating it and showcasing it through its media and assemblies. By supporting students with questions and finding projects, it can help lower barriers to engage in the programme. This feeling of support by the schools and teachers was incredibly important for students, and made it more accessible for students who feel less confident, are more shy and are not self-starters.

A number of resources were mentioned in the research that could assist schools in creating this momentum and engagement. Many were quite similar to the ones mentioned in the 'support for students' section.

- Snappy, informative video resources about the programme for assembly
- General information resources about the programme and how to find projects
- 'How to' information on starting out with volunteering, approaching people in community, holding large evens (see section above)
- Subsidised merchandise to enhance sense of affiliation and belonging
- Quality curriculum-based resources for school (like the SVA has for primary education). This would connect (subject specific) learning content to particular volunteering projects
- Reflective resources (see sections 4.6 and 4.7 for more detail)

## 4.10.Future Areas of Research

There are a number of areas that would be of interest to explore further.

### 4.10.1. Whose Voices Are We Hearing?

The students who participate in the SVA Service Award programme are not a homogenous group. While this was not a comparative research, the research indicates that there are important differences between students. These differences relate to motivation to volunteer but also to the needs different students have. If the SVA wants serve students' needs better, it is important to deepen the understanding what those differences are.

As one example of such differences, students from rural schools appeared to lack access to social connections beyond the local community that could enhance their social capital. Focus group students from a small, rural town on the South Island felt relatively isolated and disconnected from 'the happening world.' Facilitator Josephine got the impression that this also fed into feeling insecure and a lack of self-belief. Urban and higher decile students, on the other hand, get opportunities to participate in co-curricular and academic activities that involve connecting with students from other schools and regions. They also seemed to have more self-belief. For rural students, an SVA intervention focused on helping them establish connections with the wider SVA community or with tertiary SVA clubs in urban areas would potentially have great benefits for their confidence and social capital, whilst this would not make as much of a difference for the urban students.

At the moment, our understanding of the student community's needs and motivations remains incomplete. As the reflections on the focus group attendance (2.2.2) and survey participation (3.2.3) show, we had a lack of interest and representation from lower decile schools, males and also South Island students. In addition, we probably did not hear from those who are shy and less confident, even if they were part of a focus group[10]. This means that these voices are not as strongly represented in the findings as the higher decile (female) voices of those who were confident enough to speak up. Instead of seeing this as a failure, it is an invitation to explore this in more depth. The fact that lower decile students did not respond as freely to the focus group invitation, is that a reflection of them feeling that their voice is not important enough to be heard? The fact that students did not turn up after agreeing to attend, could this reflect that they don't think they will be missed? Or are they too busy 'surviving,' and there is no space for engaging with the SVA? Maybe they simply cannot participate because they have a part time job that supplements the family income. Do they feel connected with the SVA enough, or do they feel they don't belong? Also: were focus groups too public a forum for lower decile/less confident students? (The fact that the survey received a much higher response from students from lower/medium decile schools seems to suggest that.)

This is an important area for future research, and also an invitation to explore what are the ways to engage these students more and emphasise the SVA's desire to hear their voice. How can the SVA make them feel that their voice is valued?

[10] As an example, when the facilitator in Group 5 asked whether volunteering had positively impacted students' confidence, a few indicated on the Jamboard (online white board) that their confidence had not increased. However, in the discussion that followed, only those who felt that their confidence had increased spoke up.

### 4.10.2. Further Analysis of Existing Research and SVA Data

Following on from the previous, another important area of future research that would help us gain more insight into the different needs and motivations of students, is to do an additional analysis of, in particular, the quantitative survey data of this research. In particular, to review the survey answers across different deciles[11], gender (if available), geographical location and whether the student is from a private or public school. Such insights could, for instance, assist in understanding if volunteering attends to different needs or has different benefits for students from different decile schools. In addition, a similar review of existing SVA data related to volunteer/activity hours across gender, decile and geographical could be of interest too.

### 4.10.3. How Do Successful Schools Do It?

It was clear that some schools really engaged their students in the programme. These are generally schools where there is a high percentage of student volunteers, a lot of volunteering hours are being logged, students feel celebrated and supported, and where volunteering is considered cool and takes place on an ongoing basis. It would be of interest to have a look at schools that excel in this way. What do they do? How do they do it? It would be of particular interest to look at what makes a lower decile school successful in this; how do they do this with limited resources? And what would make their life easier for them? It would also be of interest to interview a few non-engaged schools, that want to do more but can't get it off the ground: What are their challenges? What would help them? These insights could, for instance, be shared with other schools as inspiration or a 'how to?' manual. They could also assist the SVA in developing resources that can support (lower) decile schools.

### 4.10.4. Regular Focus Groups and Survey

Focus groups are a powerful tool of engaging with students. They serve as a vehicle of reflection; but even more so, students felt trusted, seen and honoured by participating in a focus group. As mentioned, the data gained from focus groups are rich and more nuanced than from surveys. Doing regular focus groups, as well as a regular survey, would be a great way to stay connected to the student community.

[11] Students were not asked for their decile but we have the names of the schools the participants attend.

## 4.11.Concluding remarks

While the findings clearly show the incredible benefits of engaging in the SVA Service Award for young people involved, the SVA has the potential to create further change by widening and deepening the impact of the programme.

It can widen its impact by ensuring the programme becomes more inclusive and accessible to all, and with that the SVA can assist in levelling the playing field for less privileged youth in New Zealand. By adding reflective practices to its programme that highlight the wider context that leads many New Zealanders to need support, it can help young people to become more socially aware and engaged, and (hopefully) grow into organisational and political leaders with a social conscience. By making a conscious choice to move away from traditional notions of volunteering, it can create awareness of privilege and educate others on the limitations of 'helping' and 'charity.' It can promote participatory and indigenous approaches to volunteering which give a voice to beneficiaries and ensure that volunteering actions lead to actual community benefits.




# Appendices

# Appendices

## Appendix A: Teacher Feedback and Reflections (Phase 2)

### Barriers to Participation in Programme

The teachers talked about the barriers to participation in the programme, which included:

- *Covid19 related barriers,* like travel restrictions and lockdown; minimal volunteering opportunities. (Anna)
- *Age barrier*: Older students have a greater range of service activities to engage in; younger students have far less choice, as many activities recognised as 'service' need students to be of a certain age (e.g. tutoring at preschool).
- *Personality as a barrier*: Students who are more shy, for instance, find it harder to take risks and step out of their comfort zone to volunteer. Despite volunteering activities being really great for gaining self-confidence and forming networks,
- *Lack of awareness of the programme*: Students being “in their bubble” and not aware that the programme is happening or of the benefits of volunteering. (Bea)
- *Inability to manage school workload along with other activities*: Some students are “just surviving” with all that they need to do at school, and unable to add another activity. (Bea)

### Finding Volunteer Projects

The teachers commented that the student experience in relation to finding volunteering projects, is mixed. Some students are capable of finding their own volunteer opportunities, they enjoy the independence and autonomy. Others find that harder. In both teachers’ experience, students enjoy taking ownership (initiating, looking for opportunities, doing things themselves), and the SVA Service Award enables that. They suggested the SVA could provide more assistance by helping students identify needs and projects within their communities that are practically realistic and age appropriate, and also providing instructions that would benefit shy/reserved students. Others, who are more secure or more confident in themselves, and know their interests and skills, are fine to find projects on their own.

### Impact on Students’ Lives

The teachers commented that:

- *Volunteering assists in developing skills and becoming more competent*. They referred to practical skills like leadership skills, organisational skills, critical thinking, problem solving, but also soft skill development.
- *Positive change in behaviour; proactive social attitude*: The SVA Service Award changed student attitudes towards volunteering and helping. They have become proactive and positive, asking for opportunities around the community or school. Not just because they want to get their numbers up for the next badge but they want to be participating. (Anna)
- *The programme gives visibility, recognition and representation to those not academically minded*: Students who aren't academic or sporty achievers, or struggle in some ways, see the programme as a worthwhile use of their time. To

some of these students achieving that badge or moving up from bronze to silver is quite a big thing. They may not necessarily be the students who are always 'up the front' when it comes to academic success, or they find their day-to-day learning really tough, but through the programme they are represented and get recognised. Overall, the programme gives visibility to students' unrecognised service work.

- *Pride & confidence*: Both teachers reflected that participation in the programme impacts positively on students' confidence and they become more prideful of their achievements or service. This, in turn, Anna felt, positively influences student well-being and confidence.
- *Self-appreciation; owning achievements*: The programme celebrates students' successes, which is important because the tendency as a young person is to engage in negative self-talk. Anna reflected that it encourages students not to be whakamā about standing out and owning their work and service in the community.
- *Programme can help students become less isolated:* The programme benefits students to be more aware of the world around them and engage in it, mentioned Anna. The students involved are sometimes known as being homebody's and may feel isolated (introverted students).
- *The programme can contribute to mental health and wellbeing*: In particular during the lockdown, both teachers felt that getting involved in community service, helped students with their mental health.
- *The programme improves teacher-student relationship*: Anna said that it improves teachers' understanding of their students. They get a better idea of what students get up to and who they are when they are not in the classroom. Importantly, it enabled the celebration of the "epic stuff that doesn't fall into mainstream schooling" that the students do. It was also found to strengthen the relationship with school and teachers, by involving school staff at various levels of the award programme students build their relationships and connection with the school community. Bea said that it created a greater sense of belonging at school.
- *Exploring passions and future work*: Bea mentioned how the programme assists in creating a greater understanding of what students want to do in the future and helps them grow their passion for helping others.
- *Creates a greater understanding of their community or their world*. (Bea)
- *Work & study readiness*:
    - SVA Service Award involvement grounds a student's conversation with prospective employers/universities about their soft skills and experience; provides evidence of who they are and their abilities. (Anna)
    - Universities recognise SVA Service Award involvement and volunteer work with SVA. The programme gives prospective students a competitive edge. There is fierce competition in vocational education and apprenticeships, and it can be a challenge to stand out. (Anna)
    - Increased employability by growing skills and passions. (Bea)
- *Helps to form networks and connections*: Engaging in the programme allows students to connect with like-minded people outside their normal, small groups. It is really good for forming networks. (Bea)

## Inclusivity of Programme

When it came to inclusivity, the teachers shared the following:

- Anna saw the SVA Service Award as an inclusive programme that removes boundaries between people.
- It is accessible to everybody, you don't have to be great at sport, good at singing. (Anna)
- A broad range of activities counts, which is another aspect of inclusivity (Anna)
- It creates an opportunity for everybody to be affiliated with an activity or team. Being part of something is important for students. (Anna)
- The programme has also been a good avenue to include international and boarding students more. (Bea)

Bea commented that the programme wants to be inclusive but that it is not a practical reality:

- There will be disparities because of differences in the available time and resources among schools. This because the programme is relying on the school to drive the movement. (Bea)
- "Schools that are less resourced or have other struggles, won't be able to do this as easily. Maybe they are expending their time on just getting students through the day, or just getting them just to pass credits." (Bea)

# Appendix B: Focus Group Findings (Phase 2)

## Motivation to Volunteer

Students were asked to share their motivations to volunteer. We kept the question quite open and not specific to engagement in the SVA Service Award programme.

The most common reason to volunteer the students mentioned was a 'passion for helping others'. This is slightly different from the finding in Phase 1, which highlighted 'giving back'. The idea of 'giving back', which indicates a more reciprocal movement, was mentioned by some but certainly not by all.

Almost all were motivated to volunteer because of how it made them feel: 'It makes me feel good', 'it gives me energy' or 'I enjoy it.' Seeing the impact of my helping', was seen as motivating, as was 'making people smile.' Like Sarah said, "Seeing everyone's happy faces after the event. Knowing that I have helped some great people." Or as Tom said, "Just the little feeling of joy that you get after doing something good". Others spoke about a feeling of 'self-accomplishment', 'pride' and 'increased self-esteem' when helping others.

Some highlighted volunteering as a way to 'come together as a community' and 'fostering the kind of community I want to live in'. On a more practical level, 'meeting new people and connections' was a common motivation. Some specified this as being motivated by getting exposure to unfamiliar environments and learning from people of different backgrounds, cultures and demographics: 'The chance to network with people you wouldn't normally be able to, and building on your own understanding of the community.' Also 'making friends' and 'being surrounded by like-minded people' was a recurring motivation. As one student said, this helps her feel less isolated and alone: 'Being able to make connections and see that other people have the same mindset and passions, makes you feel less alone.'

A few students highlighted the fact that they felt more motivated when they were able to 'align their passions and interests' with volunteering actions in the world. In other words, contributing to causes you are interested in and passionate about is highly motivating. Some students also mentioned how it was a way for them to 'grow as a person' and 'gain knowledge and skills.'

A few mentioned the pins and how the competitive nature of getting more hours and the 'next level badge', motivated them.

The focus of the motivations were as such a blend of 'self' and 'other,' although it was not always clear that the students themselves were aware of that. The most common definition of volunteering offered by students, 'giving service or support to individuals or community without expecting anything in return, like praise, profit or other personal gain,' was not quite aligned with the motivations students mentioned here. Many of these motivations were, in fact, related to personal gain (how it made them feel, the skills or connections they gained). While having self-focused motivations is not an issue in itself, overinflating one's selflessness or sense of 'self-congratulation' when volunteering, is. It is important that students realise the benefit that they are getting from helping others and that they are aware that this is part of their motivation to do it.

## Suggestions for Lowering Barriers to Participation

Students mentioned a number of (interlinked) practical pathways to lower the barriers for students to get involved with volunteering through the SVA Service Award (barriers were addressed in section 2.3.4). Many suggestions focused on the SVA, or representatives, being more directly involved with schools:

- SVA to provide more information for students about what volunteering is and its benefits. E.g. dedicate a day, week or a month per year to get the word out about volunteering and highlight the importance and benefits of volunteering. Make it a fun day for schools to participate in and enjoy. “They should do like a day or something or like a month of volunteering where people from SVA go to schools, show them what they’re about and it gets the word out there.”
- Create more visibility for the SVA, its mission and the programme: Be more definitive in the service SVA provides students with. Students thought that SVA could provide more information about the programme through their websites and through direct communication with schools to get interested students involved. Having teachers talk about it and having the staff or students provide information in assemblies would help with spreading the information, and getting more students involved. An interesting comment here was that the only time that students hear about the SVA is during a disaster. As Sarah reflected: “The public shouldn’t be learning about [volunteering and the SVA] just through hazards … I’m not saying it’s their fault it’s just that the only time I heard about them other than my teacher was during a hazard. Your representation was there, but kind of wrong time.”
- SVA to visit schools and students. This was a recurring comment and desire in all focus groups. Whether through visits from SVA staff, a representative from the SVA or tertiary students involved in SVA clubs, students suggested many expressed that a direct connection with SVA would create visibility for the programme, spark interest for volunteering and inspire participation in the programme. It would also help educate students about the different kind of projects students can get involved with, and how to go about it. They mentioned presentations at assembly or SVA pop-ups.
- Connecting SVA peers and schools with each other: SVA to help forge links between the SVA peers (other high school students) and participating schools from across New Zealand. There was a deep desire from participating students to connect with other students and schools involved. This would serve to inspire and keep the energy going, but also to share ideas about volunteering projects or ‘best practice’ when it comes to doing volunteering in community. Also, it would provide some support and connection for students from less involved schools,. Ideas included: school visits/exchanges, using the app as a networking tool, a newsletter or social media through which students can share projects and experiences.
- Help schools do a large project: As mentioned before, large one-off or yearly projects, like 40 hour famine can create a lot of energy and expose a lot of students in a school at once to the programme. E.g. the SVA could provide supportive resources to run such an event (a ‘how to’ manual perhaps) to schools or representatives at schools.
- Social media to showcase projects: Unsurprisingly perhaps, the power of social media to connect with students and introduce the programme was mentioned by students. Students thought it would be good for SVA to have more social media presence and for schools to also encourage social media activity around service and volunteering through their official social media channels. The use of influencers

was also mentioned. Tom explained, “To better connect with my generation the best way to do this is through social media and social media influencers. With the 40 hour famine, what they did was, use influencers to actually promote their campaign. They had them talk about it and had them involved. They had campaigns where they would go out to schools or to communities and just talk and encourage students.”

- SVA to provide more volunteering opportunities: Besides offering general support with projects, having more projects on offer so that students with diverse skills, interests and limitations can participate was a point many students made. For instance, they suggested that the SVA could be proactive in providing volunteering projects/ideas for rural students.
- Lessen the gap between awards: To make it more accessible and less discouraging for students.

## Impact of the SVA Service Award on Students’ Lives

The literature review done in Phase 1 showed the benefits of youth volunteering and service learning in a range of outcome areas, from attitude to self, attitude to school and learning, social orientation and civic engagement, social and professional skills, and academic performance.

We explored these benefits with the students in the focus groups through the use of the online whiteboard, Jamboard, and conversation and discussion. We initially asked general questions about what they had learned. Asking students about specific examples helped clarify some of the general answers about learning, which then led to a set of more specific skill-based questions, which the students responded to by adding their initials in the relevant fields of the column of Jamboard.

### Impact on Skills

Without exception students reported that they had developed, grown or honed their skills through volunteering and the programme. Here are some of the most common, or most significant, skills mentioned.

Having developed better communication skills was mentioned by almost all students, which they related to improving their social skills and soft skills as well. Students also mentioned that volunteering had taught them how to communicate and connect with people from different backgrounds, ages and cultures. Which in turn, helped students understand them better. Samara, for instance, reflected that she had learned how to communicate and engage with people from different demographics, like age and field of work. Similarly, Sophie found that, “I have better social skills with those of different ages and cultures. I’m working with elderly people in hospitals. So the patients are somewhat hard of hearing or they’ve grown up in a different generation. Just seeing that the volume of my voice, how I’m talking, like my word choice. It’s really making me think and like connect with different people.”

Students also commonly expressed that volunteering had improved their leadership skills. This related to learning how to delegate tasks to others. For instance, Sarah reflected that volunteering “taught me that leadership isn’t just being there and telling someone what to do. It gave me a new perspective on leadership, I was shown the leadership role in ‘mentoring ways.’” Learning leadership skills also was about learning how to be an effective

leader; understanding that people are different, and that you have to change your mannerisms or approach depending on the people you lead. Tom “learned that everyone has their own perspective on life and things, and you just need to accept that. You can’t force anybody to agree with your opinion or your stance in these situations. I feel like that has helped me to grow as a person.” Related to this, students mentioned having learned how to be empathetic and sympathetic.

Other practical skills that many of the students felt they had honed or developed were organising skills (making sure everything is in order), time management skills, problem solving skills (recognising a problem and finding a solution) and learning to work under pressure. Many felt they had learned to be more flexible within work and volunteering situations. Learning how to work in a team was also mentioned. One student described this as, learning to work together regardless of your own personal feelings towards a person.

### Impact on Attitude to Self: Confidence, Self-Belief, Self-Efficacy & Resilience

It was wonderful to see that for almost every focus group participant, volunteering had boosted their confidence. This boost was often a flow-on effect of becoming more skilled and capable. For instance, being more confident in how they talk to people as a result of their volunteering and growing their social and communication skills. For Anja from Group 5, volunteering provided an opportunity to become more comfortable within an English-speaking environment. Participating in volunteering improved her confidence in her growing language and communication skills and provided her an opportunity to bond with other students who have similar interests. She thought the experience of volunteering was very helpful for her future, for both higher studies and work.

Sarah explained that she not only had gained confidence in terms of trusting her decisions, but also making eye contact with people. “Eye contact is a big thing … and if you had met me in year 9 or 10, I wouldn’t be looking at you. I’d be looking over your shoulder…. When I was put in the position of having to help people, I was forced to make eye contact with people .... Eye contact is easy for me now.” It is clear that communication and confidence go hand in hand. Shyness and overthinking were common amongst students and it was apparent that their involvement in the programme pushed them outside their comfort zone and helped them to communicate with people they wouldn’t normally, and speak up for what they needed or wanted.

Facilitator Josephine noted the significance of this increase in confidence as a result of volunteering when reflecting on Group 2. Despite being less supported by their schools, and despite the diverse composition of the group (migrant and non-migrant backgrounds), all students in this group experienced an improvement in confidence.

Self-efficacy is a related concept and speaks to the positive belief that one has the capacity and the skills to achieve their goals. Marianna from Group 5 said, “With the skills that I have developed through volunteering, I know that I am able to use those with other things that I do and so it’s made me more comfortable and confident knowing that if I do something it’ll probably be successful.” An increase in self-efficacy was often connected to doing things autonomously and of your own accord. As an illustration, Ying from Group 5 said, “It has to do with seeing what you can accomplish in your own time and of your own accord. So like with volunteering, nobody is really telling you what to do so you don’t really do it because your teacher tells you to do it, it’s more like out of your own self and I think it feeds into like seeing yourself in a better light and knowing you’re a good person.” As a final example, before joining SVA, Aisha and Anja from Group 2, were sceptical about their ability to

contribute to volunteering projects but once they got involved, they enjoyed the experience. Seeing the impact on themselves, the people they served, as well as the success of the events, Aisha felt “a sense of achievement” and a “sense that I can be part of great projects and ideas”. All three expressed interest in getting more involved. They just needed more information and support from their schools and from SVA.

Finally, almost every student felt that their resilience, which is the ability to cope with and adapt to new situations, had increased as a result of volunteering but few specific examples were shared on the practical experience of resilience.

### Impact on Pride and Social Worth

While the previous section focuses on how students feel about themselves as a result of volunteering in general, this section focuses predominantly on how the programme impacts on their pride and how they feel they are perceived by others.

Just over half of the students in the focus groups noted an increase in pride. Recognition and visibility for achievements through pins or badges, and pride about volunteering tend to go hand in hand. The pins are a sort of visual validation, which helps them feel good about themselves. Sarah (Group 4) explained that she was met with a lot of cynicism from peers at her school for volunteering and ‘giving her time for free’, She said, “I wear those badges on my blazer … with pride knowing that I proved those kids wrong. That my service work wasn’t for nothing.” Not many other reflections on pride were shared by students.

The majority of participants recorded an improvement in social worth. However, some of the discussions in a few focus groups complicated this finding. For Amanda (Group 3), for instance, being involved with the SVA programme added to her social worth at school; volunteering was encouraged and celebrated both by students as well as the staff. Kirsten and Charlotte (Group 3), however, had the opposite experience. While they got acceptance from teachers and students who were involved in/interested in volunteering, they strongly felt that the programme did not provide them an increased sense of social worth or belonging among the student community because volunteering was largely seen as ‘not cool’. “At Villa Maria, … if you volunteer, you're not really that cool” (Kirsten); “There’s something about volunteering that the boys or whoever will be like, ‘oh, that's not cool’” (Charlotte).

As final comments to this section, it was interesting how Anja from Group 5 interpreted social worth. Instead of relating it to what society and others think you are worth, she understood social worth as what you give to society: “You’re giving back to the community so in that sense you’re fulfilling your responsibilities in a society by helping out and doing your part.” This might indicate that if we do further research into the impact of the programme on social worth, it is good to confirm participants’ understanding of the term. In addition, there is existing scholarly research that links social desirability and self-esteem that could be of interest (e.g. Mesmer-Magnus, Viswesvaran, Deshpande, & Joseph, 2006). There are also studies looking at ‘coolness,’ not as an attribute of a ‘thing’ (like volunteering) but as a perceived trait of a person that could enhance our understanding of what constitutes coolness for adolescents (e.g. Dar-Nimrod, Ganesan, & MacCann, 2018).

### Impact on Connection with Teachers and Belonging at School

The interviews of Phase 1 suggested that volunteering and participation in the SVA Service Award Programme improved the student-teacher relationships. The findings or Phase 2 provided some nuance to this. The focus groups and interviews showed that participating in volunteering, and specifically in the SVA Service Award programme, had improved many students' relationships with teachers. In addition, it had strengthened their connection with the school community and peers involved with SVA, which in turn increased their sense of belonging. However, this impact was dependent on the level of involvement of the school and the school's passion for volunteering.

And the differences in the involvement between schools were stark. In Group 2, for instance, Aisha said volunteering had improved her relationship with her teachers as teachers in her school place value on service and volunteering. She also felt that volunteering made her feel closer to her school community. In Group 5, Ji-Ho reflected that "with my school we do have a service programme … they've implemented that as part of our values. That means that sometimes our teachers do encourage us and provide us with these opportunities …. I think it's good that my teachers are also involved with the volunteering work. I guess that has helped us grow closer with my teachers." However, for someone like Georgina (Group 2) the experience was very different: "It hasn't really made much of a difference because my school is not very involved." Although the sample was too small to draw definitive conclusions, this lack of involvement was seen across the board in both higher and lower decile schools. The students of the less involved schools invariably thought it would be helpful if the school got more involved and could offer more support or mentorship. Lana (Group 5): "In my school, they're not involved at all; it's very, very independent. Our school will hand out awards in our assembly but that's about it. It's mostly student-led …. I think it would be great if they could help us out sometimes."

### Impact on Career: Career plans, Work Readiness, Social Capital and Upward Social Mobility

The majority of students felt volunteering had a positive impact on their future plans and work readiness.

#### Career choice and future plans:

For many students, engaging in volunteering influenced their choice for higher studies, or clarified and strengthened their focus on a certain career path. This was reflected in choosing a study or work area that focuses on service to others. As an example, Georgina (Group 2) plans to do nursing, and feels her volunteering experience helped her clarify that she wanted to help others and serve the community. Exposure to a certain area of work through volunteering was another way in which volunteering impacted future career or study plans. One participant's volunteering in the area of 'sports coaching' had clarified and strengthened her resolve to pursue a career in that area, while another students is considering opening a book store now that she has experienced volunteering in one.

#### Work readiness:

The positive effects of volunteering mentioned in the sections above, like increase in skills, confidence, self-belief and self-efficacy, had, in turn, a positive impact on the students' feelings of work readiness. Aisha (Group 2), for instance, said that her communication skills, confidence and knowledge improved through volunteering and it made her feel more ready to take up leadership roles.

### Social capital and networking:

Many students felt that their social capital had increased through volunteering, although not specifically through SVA projects. For instance, students mentioned how they made connections with organisations and people through volunteering, which could lead to future opportunities. Ying (Group 5) explained, “Every month we have a meeting as directors of the Auckland UNICEF club and we meet with the New Zealand coordinator. I think that might be really useful in the future because if I ever think of volunteering or interning for like UNICEF that might be a useful connection to have.” Samara (Group 5) had experienced the benefits of her connections already, “I’ve been volunteering at child care for one year and so far I have built relationships with people I’m working with. They have provided me the actual opportunity to work during the holidays. They gave me a part-time job.”

Students from close knit and rural communities commented that they were already part of a community where ‘everyone knows everyone’ and as such the impact to raise their social capital within their own community was less felt. At the same time, when it comes to raising social capital outside their direct community, they saw great opportunities to grow their social capital through connecting with the wider SVA community and network (SVA staff, students connected with SVA, SVA clubs), as was also indicated in Phase 1 by the teacher.

Charlotte (Group 3) mentioned how volunteering gave her “great connections” with students with a simila interests. In addition, being the SVA school ambassador increased the opportunities for her to interact with “higher ups” in the school, which she did not have before her SVA involvement. Students also reflected that their social circle had expanded with people from more walks of life.

### Impact on Social Outcomes: Civic Identity, Civic Understanding and Social Engagement

The students mentioned how their understanding of their community and the needs of the community had improved through volunteering projects, and how they felt more connected to their local community. This was quite pronounced in Group 1: They had a range of experiences in assisting the community, and came to agreement that volunteering had helped them to know their community better and understand more about their needs.

Volunteering promoted a better understanding of people from different backgrounds in some students. Both in realising their differences with others (in terms of issues, circumstances or culture) but also in their unity with others. Marianna (Group 5) shared, “Working with people from different backgrounds, it makes you realise that a lot of us have the same passions and want to target the same issues. It's good to see that in some sense there is unity within communities.” Saanvika (Group 5) highlighted how volunteering can help students to broaden their perspective on society and to get out of the familiar bubble: “Meeting new people … has broadened my perspective regarding what others care about that is different to the perspectives that I encounter in my everyday environment. Getting out of the bubble kind of challenges it, in a way. Because, I guess, the things in my everyday life, like the people I meet like at school, all our issues are kind of similar in what we care about. Their issues are quite different, so it kind of stops me from being selfish and that there are other things that are more important.”

Only a few students mentioned that volunteering helped them “to not take things for granted” (Anja, Group 5) and to understand their privileged position. Two students in the focus groups explicitly mentioned ‘privilege’ and the role that played in their volunteering: “What is important about volunteering … was knowing that I had the privilege to be in a

position to help others and that I should use that privilege to make a difference in other people's lives who aren't as lucky as we are" (Ying, Group 5). Facilitator Monica noted that Ying self-reflects and is aware of hardships within her environment. She considers herself to be 'in a position of privilege' and through volunteering she 'uses her privilege to make a difference in someone's life.'

Some, but certainly not all, also showed an improved understanding of how they can make a difference, and what kind of help would be most appropriate for those being helped as a result of volunteering. Again, within Group 1 this was most pronounced. A key insight from this focus group related to how projects with a universal outlook promote cohesion and wellbeing in the community, and reduce the feeling of shame among those who needed such services, thus also reducing the power difference between those 'helping' and those 'being helped'. Facilitator Josephine noted how it was during the focus group discussions between the students that the group deepened their understanding of this. One of the projects the students discussed was the 'Kickstart Breakfast Club.' They realised that the universal nature of this programme made it "awesome." Marc said, "The Kickstart Breakfast club is for everyone. Anyone can come and get food there, not just those who needed help. So people don't have to feel bad when they come to eat. It is a community thing". While the breakfast club disproportionately benefits those who face food insecurity, the universal nature of it removes the shame of having to access it, in a society where poverty is seen as a shameful individual failure. This was an important and valuable insight for the students to come to. This connects with recent scholarly research about the shame surrounding targeted (means-tested) benefits in Aotearoa New Zealand (see for instance (C. Gray, 2017)). Reflections like these are important from a social impact and community outcomes perspective, because it shifts the focus from 'the helper' to 'the helped', and from 'this helping makes me feel good' to questioning 'is my helping having the social impact that I intend it to have'? Is it making their lives better?' (This is discussed in more depth in Chapter 4.)

To highlight the differences between students in this understanding, Group 1 students focused in their reflections on volunteering on the community and their needs: "The most important thing about volunteering is the difference we make in the community" (Desiree). Whilst Group 5 students, when asked whether they were able to see needs within their community, focused primarily on their own needs and interests, or, what would serve them. As one student said, "I think most of the time with my service I'm not really looking towards seeing [community needs], I guess with my service it's based more off of my interests and my passion and trying to find what I can do within those fields. It could be [to do] with my career or it could be just personal interest."

The final finding in the social outcomes section relates to future service: The vast majority of students mentioned that they plan to continue volunteering after high school, regardless of their career choice.

## Findings Volunteer Projects

The SVA asked us to explore if students want more support from the SVA in creating or finding their volunteering opportunities and projects, and what kind of support they would want. So, in the focus groups we discussed how students find their projects, the issues they encounter and what suggestions they had for the SVA. (This is a deepening of the section above that discussed barriers to volunteering).

### Students Find Projects in a Variety of Ways

Students in the focus groups found volunteering projects in a variety of ways. Some sourced projects through teachers or at school; through school noticeboards, flyers or physical posters at school. Projects were also commonly found outside of school: Through the SVA app, community or public noticeboards (like in the local library or the post office), but also through friends and family. One student even referred to responding to a Seven Sharp call for volunteers.

### Preference for Bottom-Up over Top-Down

It was common for these students to take initiative and find their own projects. Perhaps unsurprising as it could be argued that these focus group students are already 'more engaged' and 'proactive.' One student from Group 3 explained, "I tend to find more projects by myself rather than through school, because volunteering is just kind of always been like a constant in my life. So I guess I find it a lot easier to just find things myself."

Many indicated that they loved to find their own opportunities, and the majority had a preference for bottom-up projects instead of top-down ones. One, because it allows them to match their interests and passions with projects. As Sarah's quote illustrates: "Finding your own individual projects is fun because you can really find stuff that connects to you", "if you connect interests with the project … you feel more motivated to do it because it's something you like to do." Two, because they felt that somebody sitting 'far away' won't have as much knowledge of the local community. As Marc (Group 1) reflected, the community itself has the best knowledge of its own needs.

### How the SVA can Assist in Finding Projects

The support requested by students was generally tied to an issue they encountered, rather than 'laziness' or that they could not be bothered finding projects.

- Local contact information: As highlighted in the main text, students struggle finding projects locally, with the app often not providing them with options that are close enough (e.g. no projects in South Canterbury, Oamaru). Sophie (Group 5) said, "They are on the app but there's not any from where I live and so I've had to find ones on my own just because of it." Students suggested that the SVA could post contact information and descriptions of organisations students could potentially volunteer at, with the idea that the students would then be empowered to contact the organisations directly regarding any available volunteering opportunities - organisations like charities but also local volunteer groups. Information could include: Website links, social media accounts and contact information (email address and phone number). Posting this would save students time in finding projects on their own, as some noted that this process was very time consuming and existing volunteer groups are sometimes not advertised. Sarah (Group 4) said, "[SVA] doesn't need to put up 5 pages of links but at least, like, 5 per region to say this is what is happening in your own backyard. This is how you can contact them."

- Help teachers (and organisations) to trust students: A number of students shared how they aren't given the chance to contact organisations directly, because their teachers aren't trusting them to do it themselves. Sophie from Group 5 said, "It's hard because lots of volunteering opportunities, they don't trust people our age because of how young we are." Ying (Group 5) explained, "At school, a lot of the time the teachers are only

there to do like the emailing to big organisations because they don't really trust kids to do it which is kind of sad."[12] Or sometimes they seek out their own volunteering opportunities, but when it comes down to it, they still need a written statement from a teacher that says they trust the students. The comments showed that this situation negatively impacted the students' self-confidence in how they communicate (verbally through conversations and/or phone calls or through written form) with students, teachers, and organisations. But also, these students felt like these teachers simply had no idea of what they do as volunteers: "If [the teachers] were there even for an hour to see what we were doing, I feel like it would make us feel a lot more recognised because like at school it's sort of like the athletes and other people that get recognised, not so much volunteers, like people who give up their hours to help other people." They said it would be helpful for SVA to signify the importance for, and ability of, students to take on the role as main contact with an organisation, as this would encourage a trusting relationship between student and teaching staff member/s. Having more teachers involved and 'in their court' would give them more opportunities; if they could understand "yeah, you can trust someone of this age."

- Inclusive options for volunteer projects: Students would like to see more events/activities that are suitable and accessible to anyone interested in joining. Like for those with a physical disability (e.g. wheelchair bound), children or younger people, and less experienced students.

- Basic examples of ways to volunteer in your community: The majority indicated that they would benefit from SVA providing more volunteering ideas/projects. Tom (Group 4) felt that "having basic examples of ways to volunteer in our community would be a good thing because I know a lot of student and friends, they just find it difficult to find things."

As Kate from Group 5 nicely summarised, "I think it would be great if they could help us out sometimes. A bit of both: like, giving us support but also letting us find our own way."

## Student Feedback on Programme Elements

### Summary of Service

The Summary of Service was seen as useful and was valued by most students. Many students within the focus groups had already used it, and of those who had not, many indicated that they would use it in future.

The Summary of Service was used to apply to various positions, halls of residence, scholarships and jobs, often with success. For instance, several included the Summary of Service when applying for leadership positions in their school, others mentioned they had used it to apply for (part-time) jobs. One student used it to apply to become part of a regional youth council, and another put down her volunteering experience in her halls of residence application (and got into her top hall).

[12] This lack of trust was not a reflection of these students being incapable to communicate in an appropriate way. Facilitator Monica noted how polite and well-written the email communication was that she received from these students.

## UNSDGs

When asked whether they found the UNSDGs useful or interesting, students gave mixed, but predominantly negative, responses. Many students found it hard to relate to the SDGs, and even harder to connect them to a specific project. Most expressed confusion over their content, purpose and use. For instance, they did not find the UN sustainable development goals to be of relevance for their particular projects. “They [UNSDGs] are just there” remarked one student, “And they don't mean too much.” The confusion about their purpose and use was reflected in the trouble many students experienced when having to select one for their project, as they do “not neatly encompass … the volunteering service … done”. A senior, highly involved student explained how other students in her school found selecting a UNSDG difficult and approached her for clarification: “I've had lots of people at school come and ask me like, what goal they are meant to use. And I'm just like, I don't really know. I guess you just pick whatever one works best.” ‘Just picking one’ as a response to confusion was a common practice across the board.

There were a few students though, who disagreed with this, and really enjoyed having the UNSDGs on the app. In particular familiarising themselves with the UNSDGs and understanding the bigger context of service was interesting to them. Kate from Group 5 said, “It is confusing to kind of sort out what relates [to your project] but at the same time, if you find something that relates it sort of helps you understand more of how you are impacting. You get a better understanding on how you impacted the wider sort of goals.”

One suggestion was to provide a bit more clarity through a short description on the app for each UNSDG.

# Appendix C: Survey Findings (Phase 3)

## How Can SVA Assist in Finding Projects?

In terms of whether there was anything SVA could do to make finding or organising volunteering projects easier, many students answered 'no'. Of those who said yes, recurring suggestions were:

- Adding filters to search options (region/age/etc.)
    - Have different sections/options for certain (younger) age groups
- Give more ideas for volunteering:
    - Provide more ideas for "long term volunteering"
    - "Showcase more ways we can help and join with more organisations"
    - "More advertising of events on the homepage or feed of the app"
- Have more volunteering opportunities on the app
- Giving local or regional recommendations:
    - "It would be great if SVA started listing opportunities for volunteers in each region, how we can contact them, etc." (e.g. on homepage)
    - "Have a map to show where [volunteering' locations are, or [be able to] search 'volunteering projects near you'"
    - Have more rural volunteering projects/options
- Email reminders to encourage volunteering
    - "Maybe send out a list of organisations of things that need our help each month so we know good causes to volunteer for"

## Other Suggestions for the SVA

The last question of the survey was an open question about what students thought the SVA could do better or improve upon. The suggestions were very much in line with what was found in the focus groups. Several commented on the desire for more volunteering options. In terms of the programme itself, suggestions included decreasing the gap between bronze and silver awards to encourage people to keep volunteering after they receive an award. Adding more awards for different types of volunteering was also mentioned.

Other suggestions focused on raising general awareness for the programme among students, by:

- "Advertising to make more students want to join at high schools. As I am the only junior member at my school"
- "Maybe we could make a TikTok or social media accounts that have videos of what we are doing to show everyone. This might get more student to join the SVA."
- "Organise some cool events around town. Something fun, something awesome that will bring attention to the SVA and what y'all do, bring in lots of potential volunteers …. Something that has as much hype as the Colour Run or Pink Ribbon Walk, but SVA style y'know?"
- "Have someone who can talk to students at school assemblies about all the benefits of volunteering and how to start on the SVA app and stuff. Throw in some stories and all that cool jazz. I really want everyone to know about all of the cool things that come along with volunteering, you're appreciated and make connections that last a lifetime"

- “Posting more on Instagram could really help with more people joining. For a lot of people my age, Instagram is the first place they check out, so uploading more on there would be good.”

Coming together and networking as an ‘SVA Community’; was also common. Students want to see “what everyone else is doing” or “possibly have events where people within SVA get together and network.”




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