



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**  
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY INCLUSION

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## Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into Loneliness and Social Isolation in the ACT

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# ROUNDABOUT CANBERRA SUBMISSION

**ACT Government**  
Standing Committee on Education and Community  
Inclusion  
**Inquiry into Loneliness and Social Isolation in the ACT**  
**February 2024**

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# NFP SUPPORTING THE WELFARE OF CHILDREN & THE WIDER COMMUNITY

## Who we are

Since the inception of Roundabout in 2018, we have become Canberra's leading destination for the collection and recirculation of donated baby and children's items and equipment across Canberra and the surrounding regions.

We provide families in need with essential quality-assured donations to promote the safety, well-being and dignity of their children, and to support their participation in everyday activities.

Our team of over 250 volunteers help to sort, clean, restore and prepare donated items and equipment prior to distribution to our network of more than 100 Canberra-region services and charities. The opportunity to volunteer and actively participate for a good cause is a positive auxiliary outcome from our operations.

Roundabout have developed a management model that is volunteer-powered, people-centric and environmentally-responsible and have become a critical contributor to Canberra's support system for vulnerable families and the wider community.



# PREVALENCE OF LONELINESS AND SOCIAL ISOLATION

## Background & Intervention

The Australian government has raised concerns on the issue of loneliness and social isolation prior to the pandemic (AIFS, 2022),

Their concerns are validated by strong research evidence to indicate that loneliness is linked to premature deaths, poor physical and mental health, greater psychological distress and general dissatisfaction with life; and social isolation is associated to mental illness, emotional distress, suicidal ideation, dementia, premature death, poor health behaviours, smoking, physical inactivity and poor sleep (AIHW, 2023).

According to Australia's welfare report (2023), younger females and older people are at risk group of experiencing loneliness and a decline in social contact across all age groups.

CHSD (2022) purported that being older is a strong predictor of loneliness and with an ageing population, it is critical for the Australian government to focus on investing in policies and strategies to promote well-being interventions to address this amendable issue.

One intervention that has proven to be effective for combating loneliness and social isolation is volunteering for a good cause. Volunteering helps foster social connections and community involvement, encourages cognitive stimulation, and provides a sense of accomplishment and purpose which in turn enhances emotional well-being and promotes physical health (Taghian et al., 2019; Lee, 2022).

In particular for older adults, volunteering can significantly improve their social, emotional and physical well-being via empowerment. By offering opportunities for older adults to contribute their valuable knowledge, skills, experiences and abilities and to remain active members of the community enable them to regain a sense of value, autonomy and control in their lives. This empowerment can contribute to a decrease in feelings of loneliness and social isolation.

# ROUNABOUT'S VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

## Our Feedback



One of Roundabout's key values is bringing communities and volunteers together to improve the well-being of children and families in need in the ACT.

We have recorded a total of over 14,000 volunteer hours in 2023. Though the majority of our volunteer-base comprises of females who are retirees and/or seniors, there are number of younger and/or new mothers as well, and a small number of male volunteers.

Our expanding Canberra volunteer program has enabled Roundabout to increase help for 350 children in 2018 to 4175 children in 2023. The experiences conveyed by our volunteer-driven charity strongly supports the positive outcomes of volunteering from the evidenced-based findings in the previous prevalence section.

From the feedback of our volunteers, the motivations for volunteering are contributing back to society in a meaningful way, having a sense of purpose, learning from and socialising with like-minded people, sharing similar values and being a role model for the younger generation. Benefits cited generally point to improving quality of life and overall well-being as well as being valued.

The following are some of our volunteers' testimonials about their motivations for and experiences with volunteering at Roundabout:



*"I feel so connected to my community when I volunteer with Roundabout. Aside from meeting wonderful people, I really feel I'm helping others in a small way, and I never quite realised I was missing that feeling in my life until I found it."*

*"Volunteering at Roundabout is a great way to give back to the community. No skills required to start, but plenty to learn if you are willing. It is a great opportunity to meet new people whilst feeling safe and supported being both new to area and a new mom."*

*"Volunteering is so worthwhile. We are directly and meaningfully helping families and recycling..there's such a friendly and positive atmosphere at Roundabout HQ and it's directly related to the community focus."*

*It has been a wonderful way to connect with another community in a non-judgemental and giving opportunity."*



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*“I’m able to bring my small children to shifts, which helps me get out of the house and do something I enjoy. Best of all, it opens up a dialogue with them about why we should help others, be generous with our time, and share our good fortune.”*

*“Roundabout has provided me with the social engagement and brain stimulus. Whilst I always have family around me I still had a feeling of loneliness associated with not having new and like minded people to converse with. Roundabout is my happy place for feeling valued, engaged and still contributing to society.”*

*“As a person with no family within a two hour drive, the many friends I have made from volunteering with Roundabout Canberra has definitely increased my general wellbeing and feeling of social connectedness. Roundabout Canberra is an organisation I recommend to anyone wishing to connect more with their community.”*

*“Volunteering after being home and raising two young children provided me with much needed interaction with other adults and a sense of purpose outside of my home and family. It was an opportunity to give back to other mothers experiencing significant challenges. I truly believe that the social connection, drive and fulfilment that volunteering at Roundabout provided me was much greater than what I will ever be able to give back in my time and efforts.”*

*“Roundabout provided me with a sense of community that I hadn’t previously found in five years of living in Canberra. It gave me a social network and a feeling of connectedness with the community outside my work, and brought me so much happiness. The diverse and supportive the community has been absolutely wonderful, and so important for my mental wellbeing.”*

*“I have developed supportive relationships and friendships with people of all ages from different cultures, outlooks and experiences. I now have a greater sense of purpose and pride, community spirit and connection. I have also become a good role model for my adult children, my grandchildren, neighbors and friends. My physical and mental health has improved as a direct result of volunteering, and this means that I am more confident overall.”*

*“I came to Roundabout looking for a way to give back to the community at a time in my life when I no longer needed to work full-time. It has restored in me a sense of purpose, in addition to finding a community. A network of people who not only work together to achieve common goals but who offer support and friendship. It generates such a warm feeling each time I put together something to go to a child or parent in need.”*

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# THE FUTURE & RECOMMENDATIONS

Loneliness and social isolation have become significant challenges faced by many Australians. These issues not only impact individuals' well-being but have broader societal implications such as healthcare costs. The Australian government has recognised the importance of addressing loneliness and social isolation.

One effective strategy for combating the amendable issues of loneliness and social isolation is volunteering. The Australian government can play a crucial role in mitigating loneliness and social isolation, fostering stronger and more connected communities as well as maximising the value of human capital by proactively encouraging, investing and promoting volunteering initiatives.

Here are some proposed recommendations for the Australian government to achieve this:

## 1 | Promotion & Outreach

- Launch public awareness campaigns to promote the benefits of volunteering for mental health, social connectedness, and community cohesion, targeting at-risk demographics (e.g. seniors, new parents etc.).
- Utilise various communication channels, including social media, local newspapers, community bulletin boards, and public events, to raise awareness about volunteering opportunities and encourage participation.

## 2 | Partnerships with Volunteer Organisations

- Collaborate with volunteer organisations and community groups to identify opportunities for volunteering that address specific needs related to loneliness and social isolation, such as Roundabout Canberra.
- Allocate funding and resources to support the capacity-building efforts of volunteer organisations, including recruitment and training of volunteers, program development, and evaluation.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

## 3 Incentives & Recognition

- Provide incentives for volunteering, such as tax deductions, transportation subsidies, or vouchers for community services, to motivate individuals to get involved.
- Recognise and celebrate the contributions of volunteers and sharing successful volunteer stories through awards ceremonies, public acknowledgments, and social media campaigns, highlighting their impact on combating loneliness and building community connections.

## 4 Research & Evaluation

- Invest in research to better understand the relationship between volunteering, loneliness and social isolation, including the factors that motivate individuals to volunteer and the impact of volunteering on subjective well-being and social connectedness.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of government initiatives and policies aimed at promoting volunteering using feedback from volunteers, volunteer organisations, and community members to inform continual improvement efforts.

By actively promoting volunteering to raise awareness of opportunities and benefits, fostering partnerships and providing funding and resources to cultivate volunteer programs, supporting volunteer recruitment and retention, and celebrating volunteering success stories, the government can create an environment that fosters community engagement and play a significant role in facilitating and encouraging volunteering to combat loneliness and social isolation in the ACT.





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