

Sustaining Old Age Volunteerism Among CALD Population — The CASS Community Volunteer Model

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Abbreviations and definitions

CASS: Chinese Australian Services Society Ltd. Founded in 1981.

LMC: Local Management Committee

HED: Honorary Executive Director

CEO: Chief Executive Officer

CALD: Culturally and linguistically diverse

TAFE (Technical and Further Education)

Executive summary

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2016), older Australians speak over 260 languages, many of whom are immigrants and are not proficient in English. The number of older immigrants from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (CALD) is growing faster than English-speaking older people born in Australia. It is hard for CALD older people to access and engage with services and support. Existing studies have shown that they are often underrepresented in social services, such as healthcare (Marcus, Balasubramanian et al. 2022), disability (Fang and Fisher 2019, Walker, Belperio et al. 2020) and aged care (Pham, Berecki-Gisolf et al. 2021). They are also more likely to be socially isolated because of the language and cultural barriers (Han, Jung et al. 2019, Tran, Liu et al. 2022). These issues lead to the growing number of CALD older people who are disoriented, depressed & dependent.

In recent years, the COVID pandemic and the ever more frequent extreme weather conditions and natural disasters have exposed the CALD communities to higher risks, and they need to be prepared and enhance resilience (Howard, Agllias et al. 2018, Pham, Berecki-Gisolf et al. 2021). Governments, especially local councils, have tried to reach out to CALD communities. Volunteering and socialising have been proven to benefit older people both physically and mentally (Tomioka, et al., 2018; Ten Bruggencate, et al., 2018). However, there are significant challenges in engaging CALD older people in volunteering and sustaining their willingness to participate. The challenges highlight the need for enhanced community development and service capacity building for the older CALD population. The report "Volunteering and Settlement in Australia: A Snapshot" mentioned that there needs to be a better understanding of "what specific policies and procedures organisation had in place to manage volunteers" (Volunteering Australia and the Settlement Council of Australia, 2019).

Volunteering and socialising have been proven to benefit older people both physically and mentally (Tomioka, et al., 2018; Ten Bruggencate, et al., 2018). In this project, we focus on an under-researched model of community volunteering, which has been practised by Chinese Australian Services Society Ltd. (*Huaren Fuwu She* 華人服務社, here in after as "CASS") for more than a decade. Multicultural NSW, SPRC and CASS jointly fund this research. It is co-designed by the SPRC research team and CASS staff members, and the research activities involve close collaboration between the two organisations.

The central question for this research is: **how has CASS managed its volunteer activities to allow continuous contribution from CALD older people?** The more specific questions are:

1. How did CASS begin to engage with volunteering?
2. Who are the participants and what activities have been conducted?
3. What are the key components and governing structure in the CASS volunteering model?
4. How does this model nurture and support the activities and volunteers?
5. What efforts has CASS made to sustain volunteering?
6. What resources are required to sustain and improve the CASS model?
7. How did the volunteers perceive CASS volunteering?

The research team conducted in-depth interviews with CASS senior and junior staff members, CASS volunteers and Local Management Committee group leaders. The researchers also surveyed all volunteers of the participating activity groups and collected

documentation produced by CASS on those groups. CASS provided historical and operational documents on its volunteering activities.

Research findings

The project produced an in-depth analysis of the CASS Community Volunteer Model. The research findings include three main parts:

1. The changing nature of volunteering in CASS. This is examined by a historical review of the development of CASS, showing it has shifted from an organisation that uses volunteers to support its entrepreneurial activities to one that uses volunteers to conduct its core businesses and further to one that nurtures and sustains community-based volunteerism. It has become **an active player in community development for the CALD population (Asian)**.
2. The governing structure and approach of the CASS Community Volunteer Model. The approach has been conceptualised as an **assisted self-governance approach**. Distinctive features of this approach are identified as: being supportive (managerial support and training), inspirational ("career path"), low entry barrier and cultural appropriateness. In this model, activity groups are largely self-governed. CASS provides essential supports (e.g., venues and insurance, training and rule setting, and networking and outreach) to the activity groups.
3. The outcomes of the CASS Community Volunteer Model. We studied the older people's views on volunteering with CASS and their volunteer activities. We found that the demand for volunteering comes from older people's need to socialise, to feel that they are useful to the society and to feel healthy. CASS attracts older people who often find it hard to engage with the society. It also provides a channel to break down the barriers to social participation over a long period. CASS volunteering has generated **ripple effects** that reached well beyond the personal benefits of the older participants and volunteers.

The CASS Community Volunteer Model has the potential to pave the way toward a service-based incubator for volunteering. The term "incubator" is usually used in the context of sustaining new businesses. In this report, we propose the concept of a "**volunteer incubator**" to achieve social goals. It is about sustaining the capacity of volunteering, developing a sense of community and enhancing social service capacity. The incubator may create a friendly environment to allow newcomers or marginalised groups to gradually transit from being disconnected to tentatively being engaged through training and practice and finally to becoming active contributors to the community. In this process, "strangers" are gradually turned into active citizens of a community. The resulting volunteer network, which is self-motivated and community-grounded, would be able to reach diverse sectors of society and vitalise the disconnected "margin". In this sense, the volunteer incubator is an important engine that would help to drive community development. Being an "incubator" is about sustaining the momentum of volunteerism and advancing the process of social inclusion. As the community develops, unused human resources and social capital can be activated.

The CASS Community Volunteer Model adds further to the strength of the volunteer incubator by linking it to a social service sector that can channel volunteer supply to the service sectors that suffer from the challenges of labour supply. So far, there has been a lot of existing volunteer support provided by "volunteer-related organisations" and "volunteer support services". The idea of a service-based volunteer incubator combines the function of the two. Instead of waiting for fully functional volunteers to show up, the service provider proactively nurtures volunteers in their services.

Implications for practice and for policy

The approach of assisted self-governance, embedded in the CASS Community Volunteer Model, has the potential for nurturing volunteerism in both the Chinese and non-Chinese communities and different perspectives of community resilience in the post-COVID era. As a long-established and large organisation, CASS has been able to fund some of these capacity-building activities with its profits. However, it is important to point out that most social service providers are not in a position to do so. They cannot develop such an elaborate incubating system.

To fill in the gap, the government can potentially make changes in several directions:

1. Directly providing resources to support service-wide volunteer incubators. The CASS Community Volunteer Model can be adapted as backbone support for volunteer development practice as its assisted self-governance model is a light touch and caters for cultural differences. For such initiatives, the support can be in the form of funding the development of training packages.
2. Bridging knowledge exchange across different social service sectors and communities and through collaborative efforts to establish service-based volunteer incubation guidance and resource platforms.
3. Follow-up research can be conducted to evaluate further the cost and benefits of the incubator approach in different contexts, its effectiveness, the dynamics, further improvement, and the needed adaptation of this model in other settings.

1. Introduction

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2016), older Australians speak over 260 languages, many of whom are immigrants and are not proficient in English. The number of older immigrants from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (CALD) is growing faster than English-speaking older people born in Australia. It is hard for CALD older people to access and engage with services and support. Existing studies have shown that they are often underrepresented in social services, such as healthcare (Marcus, Balasubramanian et al. 2022), disability (Fang and Fisher 2019, Walker, Belperio et al. 2020) and aged care (Pham, Berecki-Gisolf et al. 2021). They are also more likely to be socially isolated because of the language and cultural barriers (Han, Jung et al. 2019, Tran, Liu et al. 2022). These issues lead to the growing number of CALD older people who are disoriented, depressed & dependent.

In recent years, the COVID pandemic and the ever more frequent extreme weather conditions have exposed CALD communities to higher risks and so they need to be prepared and enhance resilience (Howard, Agllias et al. 2018, Pham, Berecki-Gisolf et al. 2021). There have been great efforts made by governments, especially local councils, to reach out to the CALD communities. However, the difficulties of the CALD population to be socially integrated and to have equal access to services are still major challenges for the Australian society. These challenges highlight the need for enhanced community development among the CALD population, in particular among the older population. In this research, we focus on an under-researched model of community building that has been practised by CASS for more than a decade. This model has the potential to engage the older CALD people in volunteering and community-building activities and to increase their integration into Australian society and their access to services.

This research conducted an in-depth case study of the Chinese Australian Services Society Limited (*Huaren Fuwu She* 華人服務社, here in after as “CASS”) from September 2021 to August 2022. The research team collected qualitative and quantitative data to show how the organisation has initiated and managed its volunteer activities. To understand the transition of CASS, this research systematically analysed the volunteer related activities of the organisation throughout the history (since the early 1980s).

The central question for this research is: how has CASS managed its volunteer activities to allow continuous contribution from the Chinese community? The more specific research questions are:

1. How did CASS begin to engage with volunteering?
2. Who are the participants and what activities have been conducted?
3. What are the key components and governing structure in the CASS volunteering model?
4. How does this model nurture and support the activities and volunteers?
5. What efforts has CASS made to sustain volunteering?
6. What resources are required to sustain and improve the CASS model?
7. How did the volunteers perceive CASS volunteering?

2. Volunteering and social integration of CALD population—existing studies

Volunteering can be beneficial to both the volunteers and society (Handy and Mook 2011). It has the potential to enhance the physical and mental wellbeing of individuals who are supported by the volunteer (Alba et al. 2020, Conroy et al. 2020, Gates and Hughes 2021, Ramirez-Valles et al. 2005, Withall et al. 2018) and to improve the volunteers' sense of belonging and agency (Mui 2010). Flood (2005) found that loneliness is lower in people who spend at least some time each week volunteering. It is also recognised that for the older population, volunteering not only helps them bond with like-minded others but also reach out beyond their immediate community (Handy and Greenspan 2009, Putnam 2015).

Existing evidence shows the benefit of volunteering for older people and migrants (Tomioka, et al., 2018; Ten Bruggencate, et al., 2018). Volunteer activities by older people can establish a positive image for old age which helps to reduce age discrimination and improve social integration (Henkin and Zapf 2006, Vitman, Iecovich et al. 2014, Xie 2015). It has been observed that there is a growing demand for volunteering among older people (Withall et al., 2018). Volunteering also builds community resilience to various social and natural challenges by encouraging mutual support amongst elderly residents and between generations. For the culturally and linguistically diverse population, volunteering not only improves engagement with peers (Mui 2010, Wang, Chen et al. 2019), but also facilitates interactions between different migrant communities (Clair and Nayar, 2020) and between migrants and non-migrants (Henkin and Zapf 2006, Vitman, Iecovich et al. 2014, Xie 2018). A benefit of involving immigrants in volunteering is that it enables the older population to access appropriate supports and services, thus preventing future crises (such as physical and mental health or in meeting care needs) and addressing complex service challenges for service providers.

Even with the benefits of volunteering, how to reach out to potential volunteers and sustaining participation is a difficult challenge, in particular in the case of CALD (culturally and linguistically diverse) older people. This echoes the research team's anecdotal discussions with the local councils and service providers in NSW. There have been shared concerns that it is often difficult to reach the Chinese population either in terms of service use or volunteering. There are some studies on how to recruit and sustain volunteering activities (Dageid, Akintola et al. 2016, Farooq, Liu et al. 2020, Handley, Bunn et al. 2022). However, this line of research rarely focuses on older people who have language barriers or who do not share the same culture as the mainstream society. There is also research on the social integration of the CALD population and how they may benefit from volunteering. This line of research tends to propose volunteering as a 'treatment' for the loneliness of the volunteers rather than focusing on the benefit to the mainstream society of volunteering activities. As a result, volunteerism has been "prescribed" to people suffering from loneliness (Carr, Kail et al. 2018). The report "Volunteering and Settlement in Australia: A Snapshot" mentioned that there needs to be a better understanding of "what specific policies and procedures organisation had in place to manage volunteers" (Volunteering Australia and the Settlement Council of Australia, 2019).

In this research, we highlight that capacity building is crucial for attracting and sustaining volunteering in the CALD communities. There have been great efforts within the Chinese communities to engage the Chinese older people in various types of volunteering activities. They are de facto community building activities. These efforts have resulted in very active community engagements by the older people, in particular among those who could not speak English. Researching, reflecting and conceptualising how people in the Chinese communities have been organised and how they have sustained volunteerism would generate valuable and practical knowledge.

3. Methodology

Volunteering takes place in diverse contexts and for different purposes. This study reflects the intersectional nature of the issues, concerning people facing constraints to actively participate in the society in relation to their multiple identities (CALD population, older people and, often, immigrants). To understand the evolution of the CASS model, the research has to gain in-depth understanding of the role of CASS in nurturing and sustaining volunteering among the highly diverse Chinese community. We have to gain understanding of the organisation's history, the interactions among CASS as the hosting organisation of volunteers, its staff members, the volunteers and the users of volunteer services. Given the considerations, in-depth case study would be the central approach to this research.

3.1 The analytical framework

To understand how CASS has motivated volunteers and sustained volunteering, we present the CASS Community Volunteer Model in three parts.

The first part is a review of the organisational development history which will be important for understanding the interaction between the stakeholders, the evolving roles of volunteers in the organisation and the type of external support needed by the organisation at different stages of its development. It also provides the background for CASS volunteering.

The second part is an in-depth analysis of the CASS Community Volunteer Model for the activity groups — the assisted self-governance model. Unlike the care service volunteering, the activity groups were outside the CASS' core service sectors. We provide detailed analyses of the organisational structure and discuss the incentives created by this structure to sustain the volunteer activities. We conceptualise the approach adopted by CASS as an “assisted self-governance” model, highlighting the importance of the initial support for setting up groups and the continued capacity building and the light touch intervention at a later stage.

The third part examines the outcomes of the model to identify the strength of the CASS model and challenges for the future.

3.2 Data collection

The case study collected quantitative and quantitative data. No identifiable data relating to individuals were collected or stored for this project. The research has gone through ethics approval at UNSW [HC210979]. All the research recruitment documents, consent forms and questionnaires have undergone a cultural appropriateness check by a professional translation service. The research team also produced “easy read” versions of the questionnaires and consent forms for the older people. Several types of data were collected.

3.2.1 In-depth semi structured interviews with volunteers and LMC group leaders

The interview questions were developed with reference to Jacobson (2012) on motivation of volunteering and with reference to Ribeiro et al. (2018) on mapping business models.

During the interviews, the interviewers followed the topic guide. The interviews were recorded with the participants' consent. If the participants did not agree to record, the researchers took notes. The participants were reminded at the beginning of the interview that they could withdraw consent to participate during the interview.

1. Interviews (30 minutes) with 14 group leaders who are the members of local management committees (here in after as "LMC"). They are volunteers in managerial positions. The interviews discussed their motivations to participate in the activities, what do they get out of the activities and their experience and relations with CASS.
2. Interviews (30 minutes) with 24 volunteers in the 10 groups to discuss their motivation to participate in the volunteer activities, what do they get out of the activities and their experience with CASS activity groups.

In total, 43 face-to-face in-depth interviews were conducted, including five interviews with CASS staff members, 14 group leaders and 24 volunteers. We contacted 40 volunteers for the interviews. Some interviews were cancelled as a result of the new waves of COVID.

3.2.2 The volunteer survey

A survey was conducted with the volunteers in 10 activity groups (listed in Table 1). A questionnaire was designed by the SPRC research team with reference to the National Survey of Volunteering Issues by Volunteering Australia in 2011. The survey lasted about 10-15 minutes. The selection of the ten groups has considered the proportion of the Chinese population and the geographical coverage (Greater Sydney and Regional NSW). The total number of respondents was 61. The survey and interviews were conducted in Mandarin, or in some special cases, Cantonese).

Table 1 Fieldwork - Ten Senior Activity Groups

Name	Geographical Area of Sydney	Main Activity	No. of Participants
Ashfield Activity Group	Inner West	cleaning the neighbourhood & English learning:	25
Hua An Seniors Group	South West	games:	Nearly 100
Hua Xing Activity Group	South West	fitness & games	100+
Hua Kang Seniors Group	South East	dancing	50
Hua Kang Seniors Group (2)	South East	fitness	50
Wollongong Activity Group	Illawarra Region of NSW	games	40
Hornsby Activity Group	Northern	choir & dancing	
Burwood Activity Group	Inner West	fitness	71

Ashfield Activity Group Social Dance Time	Inner West	dancing	200
Campsie Activity Group	South West	fitness	38

Source: interviews.

3.2.3 Institutional data

Institutional data includes interviews (1-2 hours) with five CASS staff members working on volunteering: two activity group coordinators, two senior management staff members, the HED (Honorary Executive Director) and the CEO (Chief Executive Officer). Together with the staff members, the researchers also conducted an organisational development review and a sustainable business model mapping exercise as shown in Ribeiro, et al. (2018) to map out the governing structure of the CASS model. The organisational development review generates useful insights into the changing nature of the relationship between the organisation and the volunteers. The mapping generated information on the governance of the CASS model. The researchers also collected brochures of past activities and information on the relevant websites and media reports with the help of CASS research assistants.

3.3 Data Analysis

The analyses went through an iterative and inductive process of reducing qualitative data. This process began with open coding to develop categories from the first round of data reduction, followed by further reduction and recoding to allow core categories to emerge. Considering that translation may lead to the loss of original subtle meanings in the Chinese context (Xiao, 2014), we did not translate all the interview recordings from Chinese to English. Instead, the Chinese recordings were directly coded into themes that were translated into English. The coding was conducted and analysed using NVivo. All the quotes were double-checked by experts fluent in English and Chinese. When writing up the research findings, the researchers wrote a composite description combining “textural description” (what) and “structural description” (how) to show the essence of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2012).

The quantitative data collected through the survey were analysed with crosstabulation. As this is a small dataset. We used quantitative analyses to produce descriptive statistics to get an overview of the participants. They were not meant to generate statically robust and generalisable analyses.

COVID-safe practices: the field research took place in the venues of the hosting organisations including CASS offices and local community meeting venues. CASS enforces strict rules for COVID-safe practices. At the time of the field research, masks, hand sanitizers and QR code scanning facilities were provided on spot. The researchers followed the rules and made sure that all safety procedures were followed.

3.4 Descriptive statistics of the volunteers surveyed

On average, the volunteers who participated in the research are 70.4 years old, the most senior being 88 and the youngest 47 (seen in Table 2). An average volunteer worked in Australia for over 23 years and volunteered at CASS for 12 years. The

longest-serving volunteer has been with CASS for 28 years. The average volunteering time at CASS is typically 12 hours per week. 43% of the volunteers were working or had worked with other organisations, but the average time spent with other organisations was much shorter, about 2 hours per week.

Table 2 Basic information of volunteers

Average Age	70.4 years old
Years in Australia	23.4 years
Years knowing CASS	14.8 years.
Years of volunteering with CASS	12 years
Volunteering time with CASS	12 hours per week
Volunteering in other organisations	Yes: 43% No: 57%
Volunteering time with other organisations	2.31 hours per week

Source: survey by the team

4. The CASS Community Volunteer Model

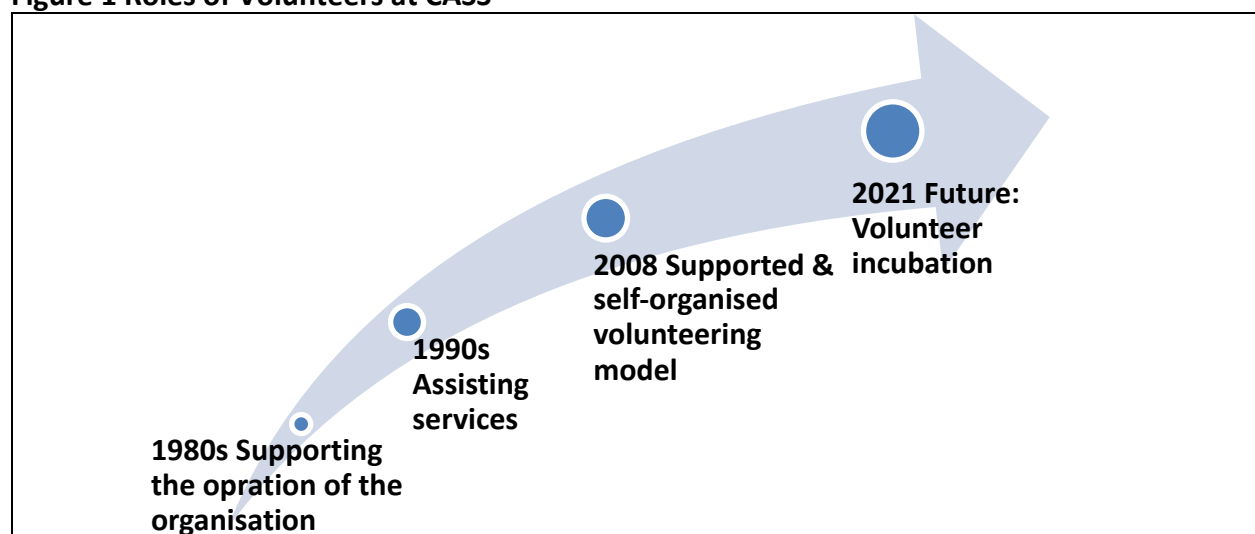
4.1 From self-serving volunteering to community volunteering

The volunteer activities of CASS have evolved over time in three stages (Figure 1).

Volunteers as entrepreneurs (1980-1983). In 1980, a group of people in the Chinese communities responded to the then Federal Government's multicultural policy to apply for funding to set up a childcare centre in Surry Hills and Chinatown areas in Sydney to cater for the growing childcare needs in the Chinese community. Henry Pan was the Convenor of the Preparation Committee. Failing to secure government grant, the committee moved on to set up the Sydney Chinese Child and Community Co-operative Society Ltd in 1982. It provided telephone referral services to match parents in need of childcare with individuals who want to provide family day care services. At this stage, the role of volunteers was to set up the organisation and sustain it. Their activities were mostly entrepreneurial and managerial.

Volunteers to support service expansion (1983-2008). In 1985, the government provided \$250,000 to the Society to purchase the venue for the Campsie Child Care Centre. Members of the society lent \$40,000 to the Centre to fill in the funding gap. Overtime, the business of CASS expanded to the following sectors: (1) aged care, such as CACP and Home and Community Care Services; (2) disability services such as Specialist Disability Accommodation; (3) childcare services such as Early Learning Centres and before/after school care; (4) vocation and training, such as Family Day Care Employment Service and work placement opportunity for students; (5) settlement and health services, such as counselling; (6) community activities and capacity building, such as Youth Groups and senior activity groups. At this stage, the businesses of CASS expanded and diversified quickly. Without volunteer support, it would be difficult for businesses to expand. Volunteers supported both business planning and most of the service delivery.

Figure 1 Roles of Volunteers at CASS



Source: drawn by the research team.

The Emergence of CASS Community Volunteer Model (2008-now). Before 2008 all senior groups/activity groups of CASS were run by CASS staff members. However, CASS found it increasingly difficult to deal with the growing demand for these groups. In 2008, CASS decided to run the groups differently. It offered in-kind support (venues, insurance) and let the older people run the groups themselves. But the management soon realised that the self-organised groups were hard to sustain when the volunteer organisers were not experienced, and the group members came from increasingly diverse backgrounds. Unresolved conflicts among members could lead to disappointment, anxiety, or lower participation. To address these issues, CASS introduced some light touch management support to the activity groups, trying to establish rules and governing structures. It also offered training to the group leaders. These supports led to an assisted self-governance volunteer model: CASS Community Volunteer Model.

4.2 The CASS Community Volunteer Model

In this section, we describe the governing structure of the CASS Community Volunteer Model, the roles of the different actors in the model, the finance of it and then discuss CASS' effort to sustain the model.

4.2.1 Governing structure: Assisted self-governance approach

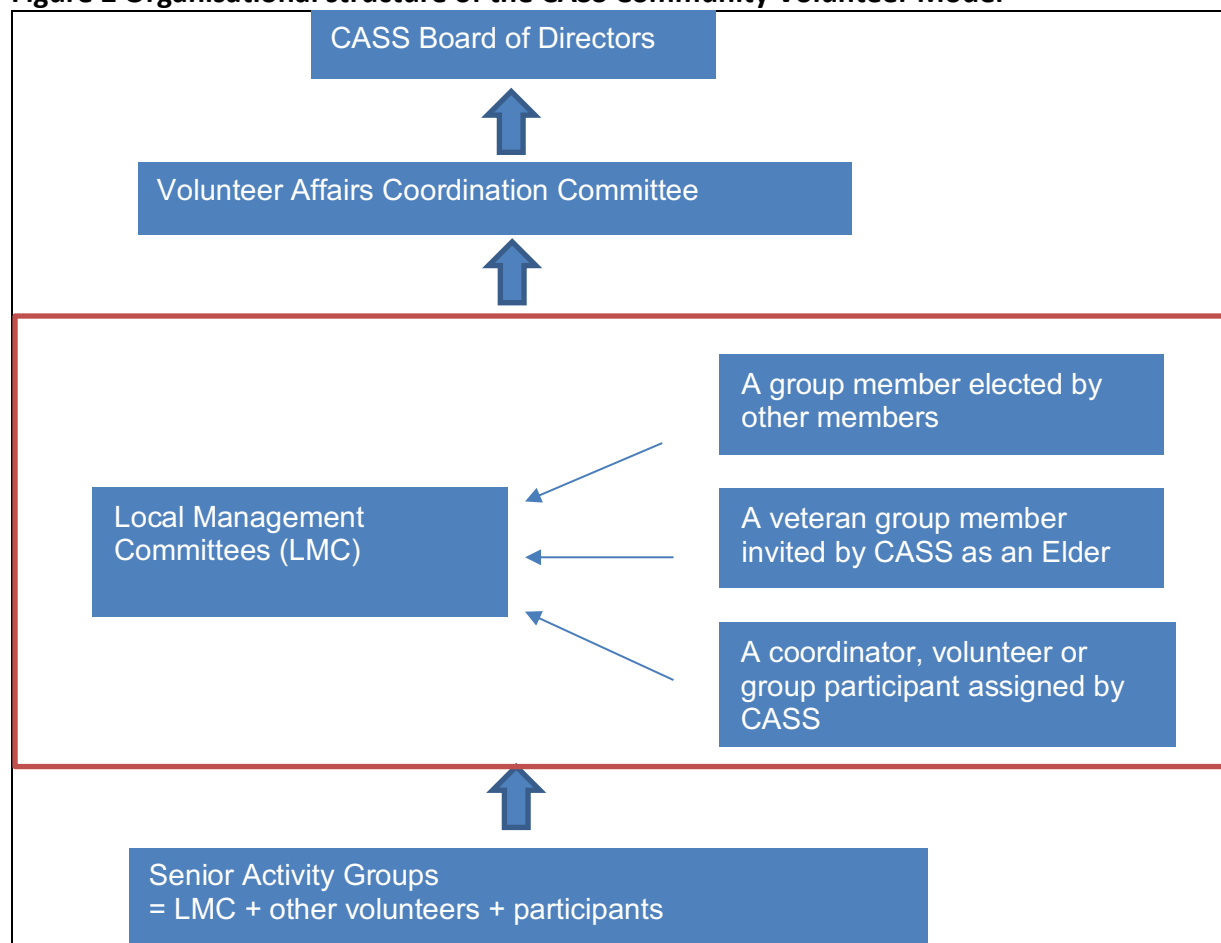
The groups are run with a principle of **assisted self-governance**, with which the LMC run by volunteers, oversee the operation of the activity groups without having to seek approval from CASS. This arrangement allows the groups to respond to the members' needs directly and the members also developed a sense of belonging and ownership of the group. The key characteristics of the model are as follows:

Vision. The CASS Community Volunteer Model uses an assisted self-governance approach to nurture and develop community volunteering to enhance the health and social integration of the CALD older population. By supporting such a model in the senior activity groups, CASS aims to: promote healthy lifestyle and active ageing, encourage the development of social support network, and facilitate community participation and access to information/services by breaking language barrier. CASS believes that funding senior activity groups would help the CALD older population achieve healthy ageing, hence delay seniors' needs for government funded aged care services in the long run.

Leadership. Volunteer activities are directly led by the CASS Board of Directors. Under the Board of Directors, there is a Volunteer Affairs Coordination Committee, which consists of volunteer representatives working in various sectors in CASS services. The committee meets every three months to discuss the developmental and operational issues in the volunteering system. The community meetings often invite CASS staff members to participate. A group coordinator facilitates the running of activity groups in different local areas (e.g. South West, Inner West, etc). Each area has multiple activity groups. Group members either only participate in the activities or volunteer as they organise the group activities.

Recruitment. Along with the growth of existing groups, some groups initiated outside CASS were also interested in being part of CASS so that they can benefit from CASS' support. CASS assesses the eligibility of such groups against two criteria: (1) whether the group fits the organisation's value in serving the CALD community by promoting healthy lifestyle, and enhancing multiculturalism and social integration, and (2) whether the group fills a service gap in the community. For example, six years after being established as "the Beijing Seniors' Group", the group joined CASS in 2020 as Hornsby Art Group.

Figure 2 Organisational structure of the CASS Community Volunteer Model



Source: produced by the authors

4.2.2 Actors in CASS Community Volunteer Model

1. CASS. While emphasising self-governance in the daily operation of the activity groups, CASS guides and assists the groups when needed. It sets up basic rules for all activity groups, conducts capacity-building activities for volunteers, and bridges collaboration with other CASS groups, government at all levels and other organisations in the wider mainstream community. The basic support from CASS includes hiring venues for the activities and insurance coverage. The staff members also help to set up the groups or facilitate the events when needed.

CASS provides training to all experienced and new volunteers. New volunteers are required to attend a three-day program to understand the culture of volunteering in Australia and the code of conduct. It also ensures that volunteers, even if not paid,

would enjoy the same rights and treatment as paid workers. For example, volunteers are subject to the same regulations regarding safe working conditions and fair treatment at the workplace. Follow-up training sessions include but are not limited to first aid courses, leadership and communication skills, physical health therapies and usage of video software. Some interviewees reported that they learnt about work safety, how to interact with people from diverse backgrounds and how to choose the right person for the right tasks. For the volunteers who assist not only in activity groups but also in aged care facilities, CASS provides more specialised training on how to care for the elderly.

CASS has been trying to streamline and standardise the volunteer training practices for people who are willing to volunteer. New volunteers are required to attend an induction course and encouraged to attend other training programs. Experienced ones are encouraged to take refreshing lessons. Some volunteers who have been volunteering with CASS for decades are reluctant to attend training as they see it as unnecessary. Both the survey and the in-depth interviews showed similar results. About one-third of the older people felt there was no need to participate in training as they had worked with CASS for many years. However, two thirds who participated in the training courses felt the materials were valuable and they could learn something useful.

Increasingly, CASS bridges the collaboration between the groups and the governments at all levels, especially local councils. This role allows government departments and councils to reach its senior CALD residents and volunteers more easily. For example, in the past two years, NSW Health organised COVID related information sessions in the groups. The Ku-Ring-Gai Council also organised consultation sessions in the Gordon Activity Group to collect feedback from the CALD residents in its Social Plan.

2. LMC. The LMC is the core link of the governing structure (shown in Figure 2), as it is responsible for the day-to-day operation of the activity groups. The LMC has three components. The head members of a group form part of the LMC. In most cases, they are elected by group participants through a democratic election process. In some special circumstances (e.g., the head members are absent from the group due to illness or being overseas), CASS management assigns other volunteers to run the group. The LMC also includes a CASS staff (i.e., the group coordinator). The coordinator acts as a bridge between CASS management and the group: forwarding bottom-up initiatives, suggestions, and requests; facilitating the daily operation of the group when needed and delivering top-down information for new activities (e.g., events organised by local councils). Thirdly, a veteran group member who has volunteered in a particular group for a long time may be invited by CASS to join LMC as an advisor (known as an Elder).

LMC leaders liaise with group members using social media apps, such as WeChat and WhatsApp. With these smart phone apps, the leader announces notifications, shares information (e.g., services available for the elderly in NSW) and organises peer support (e.g., car rides for those with limited mobility). Before the pandemic, some leaders used social media to organise volunteers to do home visits and hospital visits to those who were absent from the activity groups due to illness.

3. The volunteers. Under the model, the volunteers have two main functions in a group. First, the volunteers provide everyday support to the participants within and beyond the activity groups. Within the group, the volunteers work as kitchen hands, cooks, or cleaners as well as teachers. Most activities are taught/led by the group members with special skills of interest. These teachers used to be professional dancers, opera singers, calligraphy artists, school music teachers, chefs, hairdressers.... They utilise their specialties to organise learning activities that help the seniors to develop new hobbies. They are important assets for CASS in the groups. The volunteers also provide various onside support. For example, in Ashfield dancing group, there is a volunteer who worked as a nurse for over 40 years in China. Her expertise allows her to identify the first signs of discomfort in some seniors and so she can quickly send them to nearby clinics. The volunteers who can drive would help to pick up group members from their homes.

4.2.3 Finance of the model

The CASS Community Volunteer Model appears to be cost-effective. As discussed earlier, CASS provides significant in-kind support to the activity groups, including managerial and networking support, venue rental and insurance coverage. In the financial year 2021/22, CASS self-funded AU\$51,300 to support the activity groups. The money has been spent on hiring venues and insurance payment.

The activity groups endeavour to be financially self-sufficient. The LMC, after consulting with non-LMC volunteers, would decide on the fee the group could charge each participant. To become a member of a CASS group, each participant pays a one-off membership fee (\$38 at the time of this research). For each activity, there is a small fee to cover the operation costs (e.g., materials needed for activities and refreshments). The surplus would allow the group to organise birthday and festival celebrations. Some groups would be able to subsidise social dining or organised trips. The activities and the fee structure of some groups are listed in Table 3.

Table 3 Activities and fee structure of the ten activity groups researched

Location	Types of activity	Fees*
Ashfield	Social dance, line dance	\$1 (members); \$2 (non-members)
	Fitness dance, conversational English class	\$1 for all
Gordon	Chinese square-dancing class, karaoke	\$1 (members); \$1.5 (non-members)
Campsie	Tai Chi, line dance, social dance, morning tea, karaoke	\$1.5 for all
Burwood	Fitness, conversational English class, morning tea	\$1.5 (members); \$2 (non-members)

Bankstown	Tai Chi, swordplay etc., teatime, line dance, singing, snooker, Chinese chess, blood pressure measuring (free)	\$3 for all
	Fitness, swordplay, tea break, dancing, haircut	\$1 for all; \$3 for haircut
Wollongong	Music appreciation, fitness, news reading, Bingo, card games, chess, mah-jong, Karaoke	\$2 for all
Castle Hill	Square dance, singing, fashion show class	Nil (temporary)
Kogarah	Conversational English class, dancing, Chinese painting, oil painting and Chinese calligraphy	\$1 (members); \$1.5 (non-members)
Auburn	Square dance, folk dance, fitness	\$1 (members); \$1.5 (non-members)

*\$38 one-off membership fee applies as of 2022.

Source: In-depth interviews by the research team.

4.3 Outcomes

4.3.1 The activities

The types of activities provided by these groups have increased overtime, moving from traditional activities such as social gatherings, board/card games, Tai chi to a much wider range of new activities such as art, music, physical exercises, language learning, health and wellbeing. With the assistance of volunteers, the activities also expand to more geographical locations. Over 30 senior activity groups are self-managed with more than 400 elderly volunteers. With the help of CASS, the groups also become more engaged with the wider society: such as visits to police station, fire station, public parks, participate in Seniors Festival celebration, Harmony Day activities, ANZAC Day ceremonies, picking up rubbish in public place, helping young kids in childcare centres through intergenerational programs.

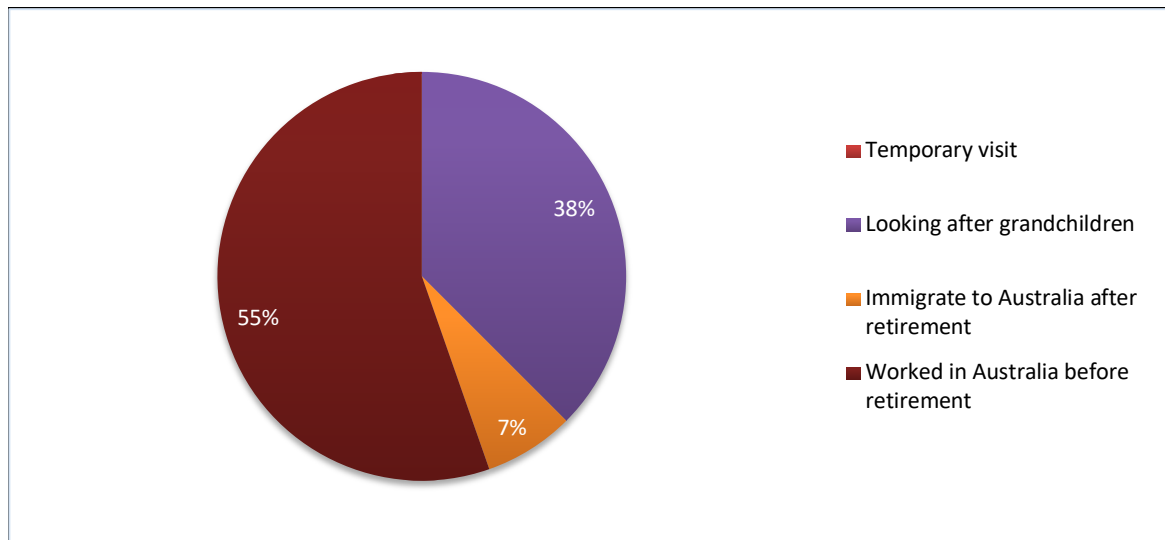
4.3.2 The volunteers

Over the years, CASS has trained more than 400 volunteers and over 30 social/activity groups were developed. As shown in Figure 3, 55 per cent of the interviewees had worked and retired in Australia; 38 per cent came to Australia to look after their grandchildren. 7 per cent immigrated to Australia after they retired in China. Temporary-visiting seniors are participants of the activity groups, but they are unlikely to volunteer. This could be because many of them look after their grandchildren or support their own children at home.

CASS has been able to engage non-English speaking volunteers. Figure 4 shows the volunteers' English proficiency, 76 per cent of the volunteers speak no or very basic English. Less than a quarter of the volunteers can use English for daily life communication. It is important to note that without an organisation like CASS, most

of the volunteers involved in this research project would not have a chance to volunteer because of the language barrier.

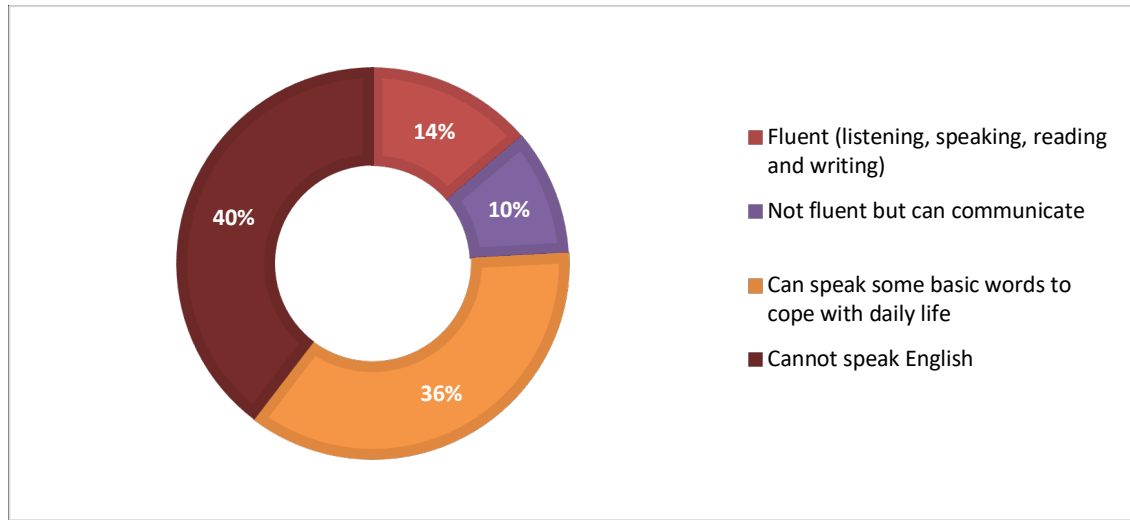
Figure 3 Status in Australia (n=61)



Source: survey by the research team

CASS volunteers come from very mixed backgrounds, and they speak different languages, including English, Mandarin, Cantonese, and Shanghai dialect. About one fourth can communicate in English. The rest virtually cannot communicate in English. It is difficult for these people to integrate seamlessly into the mainstream volunteering scene. However, we notice that there have been a couple of volunteers who do not speak any Chinese languages and still managed to participate in the group activities in Chinese for quite a long time. This means that if the groups behave inclusively, language is not necessarily a barrier for many of the activities.

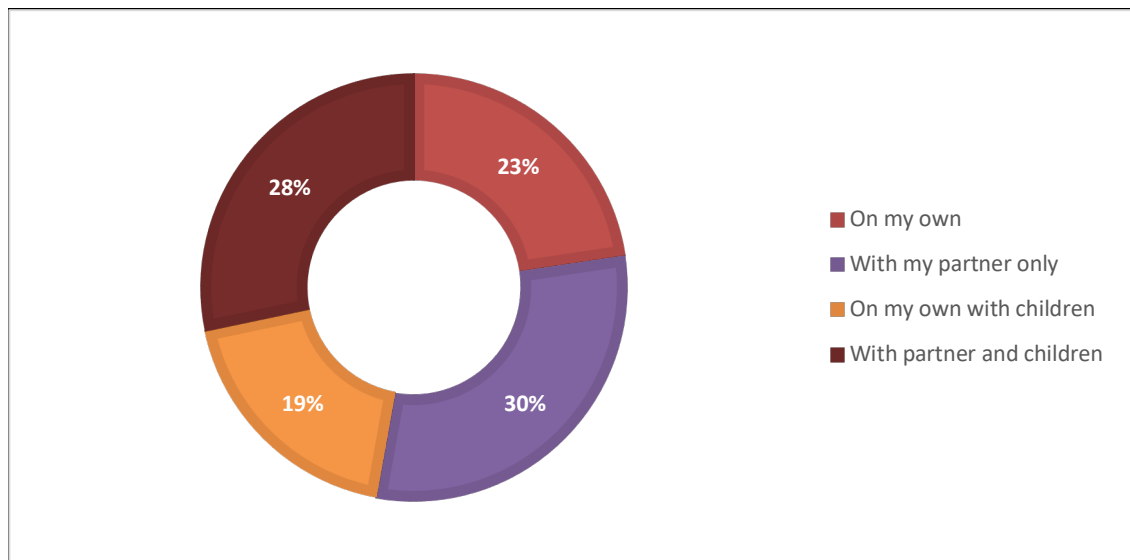
Figure 4 English Proficiency (n=61)



Source: survey by the research team

The living status of the volunteers who participated in the research are distributed in four categories (Figure 5), with 77 percent living with at least one family member and 23 percent living alone.

Figure 5 Living status of the senior volunteers (n=61)



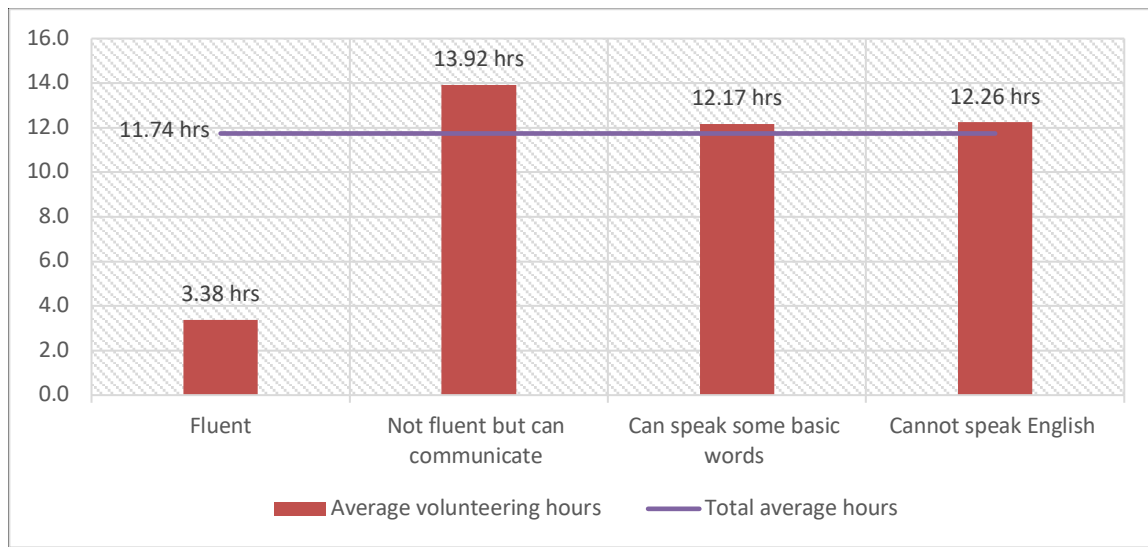
Source: survey by the research team

4.3.3 Languages, volunteering time and motivations

A person on average volunteers in CASS for 12 hours per week. Interestingly, people who are not fluent in English spend more time volunteering than those who are fluent (Figure 6). This is related to the fact that the people who cannot speak English well are older than competent English users. The non-to-little-English users have stayed in Australia longer, retired longer and they do not need to look after younger children as much as the younger volunteers. At the same time, they treat

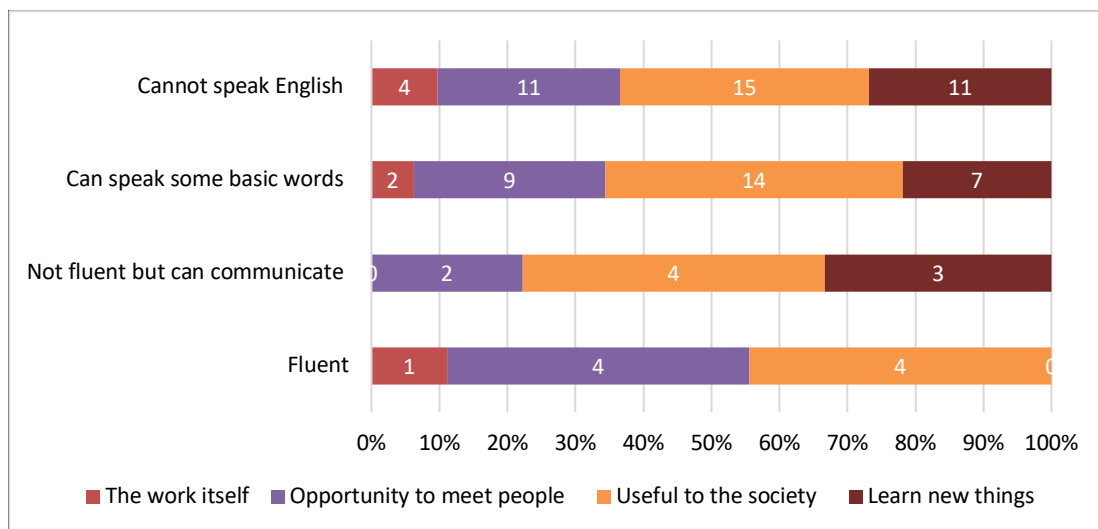
the activity groups as an important part of their social life. It is also worth noting that, the ones who are not fluent but can communicate in English, contribute the longest hours (nearly 14 hours per week) of their weekly life to volunteering. It is highly likely that they have picked up the language during the many years of participating and volunteering, as English learning is one of the activities carried out in the activity groups.

Figure 6 English proficiency & average volunteering hours



Source: survey by the research team

Figure 7 English proficiency & motivation for volunteering

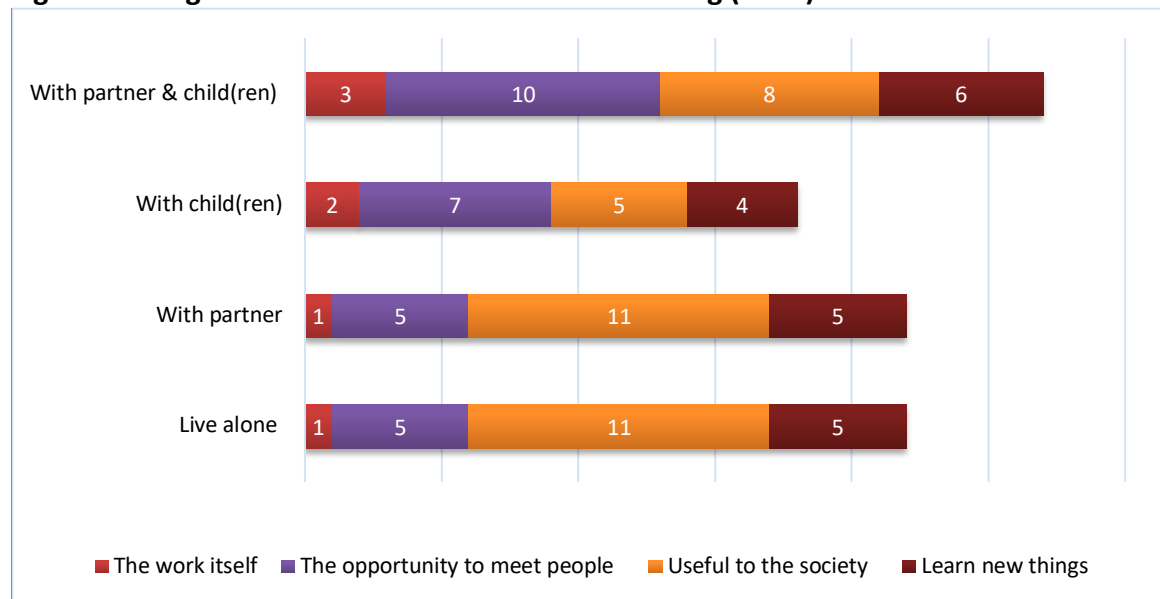


Source: survey by the research team

The living arrangement can affect the volunteering pattern. On average, the seniors living alone spent 16 hours per week on volunteering. Almost 5 hours more than the average. As shown in Figure 8, the older immigrants living with their partners and children are interested in volunteering because they want to know more people. This could be because they are relatively new to Australia or have less active social life because of more family responsibilities, such as cooking or looking after

grandchildren. When the seniors do not live with their own children, which usually mean that they might have been here for a longer period and did not have as much family responsibilities, they wanted to feel that they are useful to the society.

Figure 8 Living status and motivation for volunteering (n=61)



Source: survey by the research team

4.3.4 Perceived benefits of volunteering

It is important to look at how the seniors themselves perceive the benefits of the volunteer activities.

Australian Healthdirect listed the following items as benefiting the mental health and wellbeing of the volunteers. Volunteering can:

1. give people a sense of achievement and purpose.
2. help people feel part of a community.
3. help people feel better about themselves by improving their self-esteem and confidence.
4. help people share their talents, learn new skills.
5. help combat stress, loneliness, social isolation and depression.
6. help meet new people, which can help volunteers feel more connected and valued (Healthdirect.gov.au., 2021).

The reports from CASS respondents echo the benefits suggested in Healthdirect, showing that volunteering is important for the CALD population as well. Interestingly, when we put the reported benefits and CASS’ aims together, CASS, as a social service provider, did not stress older people being useful to the society and focused on looking after the needs of older people. Even so, the seniors are keen to be perceived as “being useful”. This is particularly the case when they become more independent from their children.

Table 4 Perceived Benefits of volunteering and the aims of CASS (N=61)

Perceived benefits	CASS Aims	No.
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Socialise, reduce loneliness & create sense of belonging	Encouraging and facilitating community participation Encouraging the development of social support network	29
Being useful to society (self-worth & beneficial to others)	As above	25
Physical and mental (Feeling happy & relaxed) wellbeing	Promoting healthy lifestyle and active ageing	20
Learn new knowledge and skills	Breaking language barrier and facilitate access to information / services	6

Note: The respondents were able to select more than one answer.

Source: survey by the research team

4.3.5 Awareness and attitudes towards CASS support

Table 5 summarises the types of support and how many interviewees have mentioned each type of support during the interviews. The number counts show what are the valued support from the user's perspective. Out of the ten groups visited, four stated the significance of CASS covering the rentals. Those groups were initiated by migrants who then newly arrived in Australia. The group founders recounted how they used out-of-pocket funds and hence how difficult it was to find an affordable yet convenient location for the group participants to meet. Some interviewees also understood the necessity of public liability insurance, especially given the age of the group participants. A volunteer who was injured when helping an organisation without such cover, told us that she now only volunteers with CASS because of the hard-learned experience.

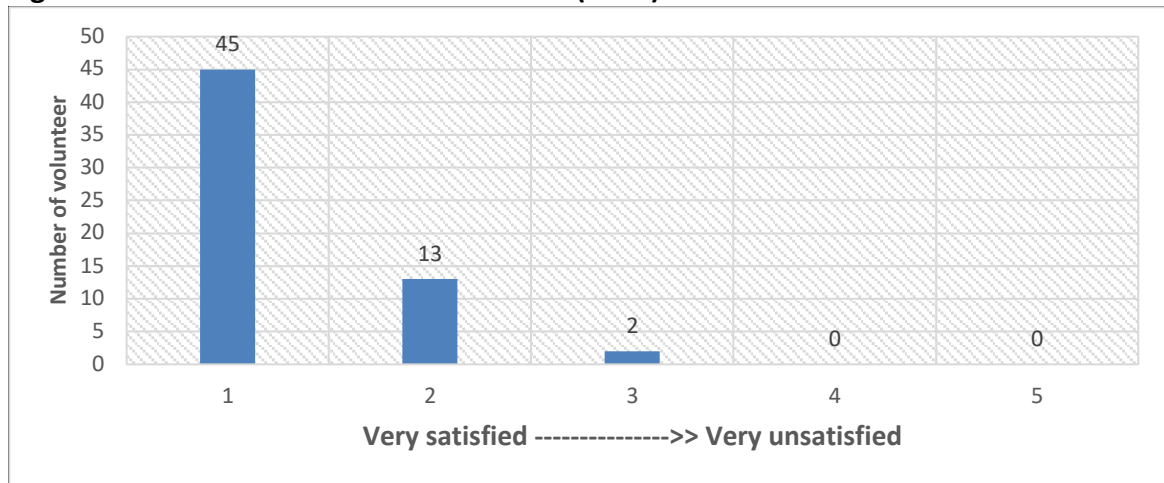
Table 5 Support by CASS to activity groups (N=38)

Type of support	Mention counts
Training	17
Motivational measures (awards, promotion, thanksgiving events)	15
Paying for Venue & Insurance	10
Guiding and managing	8
Working with government	5
Special events	3
Organising teachers	2
Other help	4

Source: In-depth interviews by the research team.

The volunteers were in general very satisfied with their experience with CASS. 45 out of the 61 survey respondents indicated that they were happy with the activities. Over 90 per cent indicated they enjoyed the volunteering work; hence they would continue to recommend CASS to their friends.

Figure 9 Volunteers satisfaction with CASS (n=61)



Source: survey by the research team

4.4 Sustaining volunteering

Similar to all organisations that uses volunteers, CASS also faces the challenge of sustaining the supply of volunteers. The assisted self-governance model itself is a supporting structure for volunteers when they struggle. At each stage of the life cycle of an activity group (starting up, sustaining interests, accepting new members), there can be very different challenges. These challenges when not addressed may become disincentives for volunteer activities. CASS managerial and network support makes the volunteers and the LMC members feel that they could have someone to turn to when they face difficulties and opens new doors for them when there are opportunities. The interviews also revealed that the volunteers valued some features of the CASS Community Volunteer Model.

1. *Positive feedback and clear “career path”.* To motivate the participants, CASS actively expressed its appreciation of the volunteers’ contributions by providing volunteer certificates, nominating volunteers for local or state government awards, and giving titles for volunteers with long and outstanding services. CASS also organises volunteer parties and annual thank-you lunch events. To many non-English speaking Chinese elders, producing the needed documentation to prove their experience as volunteers or status quo is often a daunting task. CASS provides proper documentation timely for the volunteers. Even though this support is not meant to be a reward, the volunteers expressed appreciation of it during the interviews. To motivate the volunteers, a “career path” is created under this volunteer model. More experienced volunteers work closely with newcomers as mentors. The more experienced group leaders would be promoted to advisors of the group and participate in decision-making at a higher level.
2. *Low barrier to enter.* It is important to note that the participants of CASS activity groups face particularly high hurdles when trying to navigate the Australian society and become active members. The hurdles are both psychological and functional. The entertaining activities provided by the

activity groups provides accessible stepping-stones. It allows the older people to establish a sense of community first before deciding whether to engage.

While endeavouring to standardise volunteers' practice through training, CASS was careful not to wear out the volunteers' enthusiasm by allowing a degree of flexibility. For example, for those who are unable or fail to attend training classes, the group coordinators would provide one-on-one sessions outside the training time. For the seniors in their 70s and 80s who have been volunteering in CASS for decades and hence reluctant to accept new rules, CASS adopts a patient and gradual approach to persuade them to accept training.

3. *Achieving Cultural appropriateness.* Apart from hiring staff members with competent language skills, deeper understanding of cultural appropriateness is crucial for sustaining the enthusiasm of the volunteers. CASS pays special attention to the cultural appropriateness of both the services provided and the management style of the staff members. In many Asian countries, in particular those from the Confucian culture, older people would expect to be respected and well looked after. People with more experience or in a senior position at work would also expect to be respected by those less senior. This means the CASS staff behaviour needs to be particularly respectful to the older people, even when they are implementing administrative rules or regulations. When an older person is not keen to follow some of the rules, the staff members need to be subtle and patient when trying to change behaviour. They have to persuade the older people to agree to conform, rather than instruct them to adhere to the rules. Another example can be the appointment of a group leader. People with a lot of experience, in particular those who started a group would often be reluctant to retire from the group leader's position. Others in the same group may not feel comfortable asking the older person to retire. The disadvantage for the leader to stay for a very long time is that the younger members would not have the opportunities to develop their leadership skills. CASS received some complaints about this. Instead of pressing the older leaders to resign, CASS set up advisory roles and invite the long serving older people to become advisors. Such arrangements solved problems without making the older leaders feel not appreciated.

The Chinese people in Australia come from different countries around the world. Language barriers aside, there are diverse religious beliefs, political views and the increasingly difficult geopolitical conflicts may result in stress and anxiety when members are divided. To avoid tension, CASS does not take on group proposals that would involve religious and political activities. Volunteers are also not permitted to promote politics or religion in CASS venues and activities. In this way, older people from different political and religious backgrounds would not feel excluded.

4.5 The ripple effects of CASS Community Volunteer Model

The research reveals significant ripple effects that go beyond the activity groups and beyond CASS. Many participants came to the activity groups with personal interests in getting to know people, doing some exercises, or learning some new skills. After

they participated in the activity groups, partially becoming enthusiastic about the actives and partly influenced by other group members they started to take on various volunteer tasks in the groups. These could be administrative roles such as setting up the meeting venues or picking up other participants. Giving members a lift may often be extended to other life support for members who need help, such as helping to do shopping, driving to see doctors or home visits when needed. Other volunteer activities could be becoming teachers or group leaders in other locations.

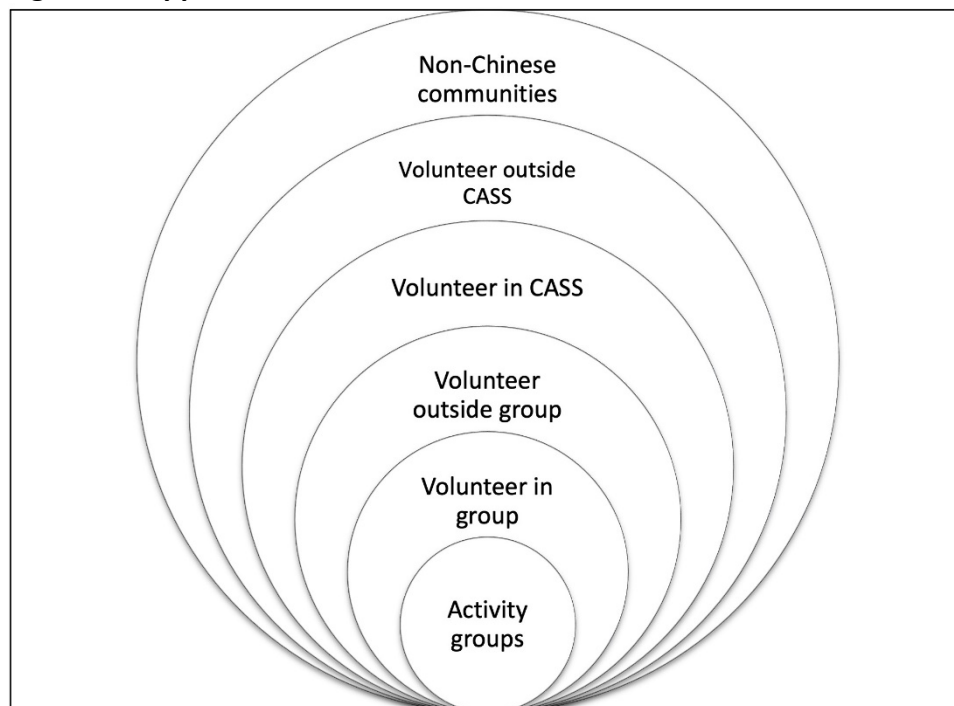
The groups also act as important service hubs that distribute service information to the communities. The CASS support staff organises information sessions in areas such as health, welfare, safety, and aged care. The government departments / councils also do consultations in the groups, which helps to tackle the lasting challenge for the governments and service providers to reach the targeted audience.

With training and hands-on practice in the group, some capable volunteers also help in other services of CASS, especially in Residential Aged Care Services and Home Ageing Services. The group coordinators utilise activity groups as a talent pool to seek suitable volunteers for other service sectors, thanks to the fact that the senior volunteers are more available and reliable. The group participants register EOI of volunteering with CASS. They are asked about their specialties/interests, according to which CASS assigns them to various services. When such needs arise, the seniors who have demonstrated the skills required through their work in an activity group would be invited by CASS to help in other sectors. Such skills include but are not limited to driving, English literacy, cooking, professional expertise (e.g., nursing skills), and extraordinary communication skills (e.g., being patient and warm-hearted). These volunteers have proven particularly useful in providing culturally appropriate assistance to seniors in the CALD community. Taking the “Connect Call (長者電話關懷服務, *lit. caring for the senior via phone calls*)” service as an example, regular chats with someone who speaks the same home-town dialect are particularly comforting for a home-staying senior. In the past five years, over 100 volunteers have been recruited from activity group helpers.

Furthermore, the interviews revealed that some CASS volunteers also participate in non-CASS activities. Because of their hands on experience and training in CASS, they often became important volunteers or advisors in the other organisations.

With the success in the Chinese community, CASS also started to apply the assisted self-governance volunteer model to non-Chinese communities. With the help of volunteers, CASS has opened eleven Day Care Centres with an average of about 500 people attending the regular activities each week in 2022. The CASS Korean Settlement Services Team started a volunteer service in 2020. By the end of 2020, CASS had over 50 volunteers supporting the provision of services and activities to the Korean community including Home Ageing Services, Disability Services and Settlement Services. The CASS volunteer-supported services can reach over 3300 families on a weekly basis.

Figure 10 Ripple effects



Source: produced by the research team

4.6 Resilience

Like volunteering activities in other sectors and communities, CASS' activity groups and volunteering were also affected by the COVID pandemic. In the early days of COVID-19, the groups actively embraced digital platforms and quickly moved meetings online. The volunteers helped and taught other group members how to set up and use digital apps. When the full lockdowns kicked in, some activities were able to continue. CASS also organised numerous online COVID information and mental health knowledge events which were available in both Mandarin and Cantonese. These events, though not part of the activity groups, made the members, whether they live far away or close by, feel that the organisation cared for their wellbeing. In the post-pandemic era, the volunteers adjusted their activities to guarantee health and safety. For example, apart from the usual sanitation and mask-wearing requirements, ballroom dancing has been replaced by line dancing and fitness dance to avoid close contact. More exercise options are developed for the elderly who are physically frail.

4.7 Remaining challenges

Even with the success of the CASS Community Volunteer Model, this research identifies some issues that need to be addressed in the future. In the long-established groups, even though the LMC members are supposed to be elected, the senior members tend to be repeatedly elected. Younger volunteers, though enthusiastic, often find it hard to be more involved. This has a negative impact on the motivation of some younger participants and may constrain the healthy growth of the group. As discussed, CASS has managed to set up advisory posts for some of the

older group leaders or LMC members. However, this is still not sufficient. Extra solutions such as term limits or rotation may help to improve further.

The newly merged groups, regional groups and the emergence of the non-Chinese groups have greater demand for more support from CASS. So far, the limited manpower of CASS staff is already over-stretched. Some groups located far away from metropolitan Sydney have been less engaged with CASS as a result. CASS has assigned staff to assist some of the remote groups, however the COVID-19 situation has made it difficult for the groups to be more actively involved. Those groups received less training and participated in fewer institution-wide events compared to their city counterparts. Given that the people in these groups are more isolated than those in the large cities and may have greater needs for support, it would be useful for CASS to develop special strategies that target the more remote groups even though its current efforts are to produce more standardised services for all groups.

5. Discussion and conclusion

The recreational activity groups serve important social functions. The groups and the related volunteering activities are de facto efforts to turn strangers' society into friendly communities, which will develop social capital valuable for members of society, service providers as well as the local councils. The field research finds that older people want to be socially engaged, they want to be useful to the society and volunteering keep the volunteers healthier and happier. From the society's perspective, the healthier and happier population will improve healthy and active aging. From the government's perspective, reducing old age dependency and make use of the not used human resources can make Australia's aged care system more sustainable. Of course, the question is how to achieve the desirable outcomes.

This in-depth case study of CASS Community Volunteer Model shows that CASS has over time shifted from using volunteers for business development to developing a team of volunteers that is robust, skilled and committed with a high level of independence. This research focuses on volunteer activities that are not the core of the organisation's old age care business. We examined how CASS developed the assisted self-governance model for volunteering in the CALD community which turned out to be cost efficient, empowering, and sustainable.

5.1 Assisted self-governance approach to volunteering

CASS, as the management organisation of the activity groups, does not take a managerial attitude. The CASS' institutional intervention is crucial but light touch, and the focus is on capacity building and providing needed support. A series of assistance is available to the activity groups: venues, insurance, network, managerial, training and rule setting.

The assisted self-governance model is instrumental in overcoming the usual challenge faced by self-organised volunteer initiatives: an inexperienced leader may disincentivise the whole group. The CASS model allows the groups to resort to CASS support when needed. The mentorship by the older volunteers and the training provided by CASS are particularly important given that a large proportion of the members and volunteers are older immigrants who do not necessarily have the knowledge or do not always feel confident to lead other volunteers. This is particularly the case when the group leaders may not speak English. Without the institutional support of CASS, the leaders may find it difficult to engage with the wider society or jump over the administrative hurdles.

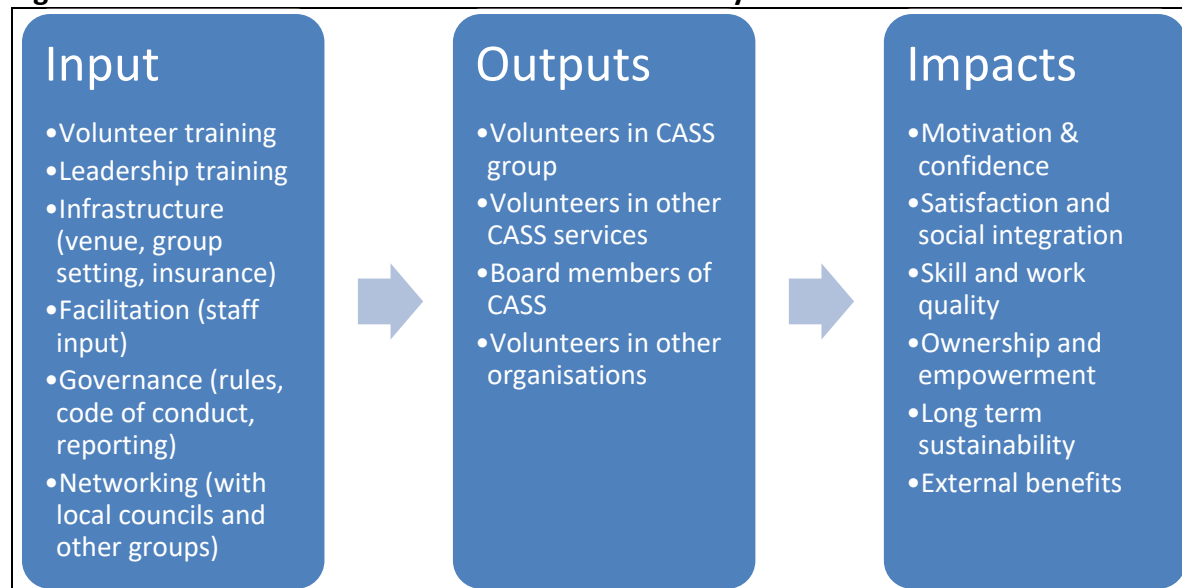
In the volunteering literature (Volunteering Australia & Settlement Council of Australia, 2019), there are "volunteer involving organisations" and "volunteering support services". The CASS activity groups are, to a great extent, a combination of the two. The activity groups are independent of its core businesses, but at the same time, can function as the talent pool. Volunteers can be channelled to its core businesses. What is more, CASS's cultural competence goes well beyond hiring Chinese language staff members. It showed deep understanding of the culture of being respectful to older people and repeatedly expresses appreciation in different forms and celebrates the volunteers' achievements. When facing emergency

situations or conflicts, CASS would be more involved and provide guidance or management support.

5.2 The future: CASS Volunteer Incubator for CALD older people

CASS is entering into a new era to adopt a more systematic approach toward its assisted governance model in 2022. This means that the CASS Community Volunteer Model can be further developed into a dedicated Volunteer Incubator for the CALD population. Similar to the concept of a business incubator, a volunteer Incubator considers the CALD older people who may suffer from social isolation as potential contributors to society. The incubator creates the structure and atmosphere for the CALD older people to contribute. The incubator supports inexperienced volunteers and volunteer leaders in the CALD community to develop the capacity to volunteer. Unlike business incubators that aim to sustain business profitability, volunteering incubators aim to sustain volunteer activities in the community and in non-profit social services.

Figure 11 A Volunteer Incubator with CASS Community Volunteer Model



As shown in Figure 11, the experience of the CASS Community Volunteer Model has paved the way toward a fully functioning incubator for volunteering. The “**volunteer incubator**” reaches out to members of society that are socially isolated (or disconnected, disoriented) by supporting volunteer activities and developing volunteer networks. The volunteer network extends to new immigrants, or even immigrants whose cannot speak English. Based on the principle of assisted self-governance, the incubator creates a friendly environment which would allow members of a community to gradually transit from being disconnected to being tentatively engaged and informally volunteer, then to participating in training, and finally to actively contributing to the community. Beyond the personal benefits, the incubator helps a strangers’ community to develop a stronger sense of community. The resulting volunteer network which is self-motivated and grounded in the community would be able to reach the capillaries of the society and vitalise the disconnected “margin”. In this sense, the volunteer incubator is an important engine that would help to drive community development. Being an “incubator” is about

sustaining the momentum of volunteerism and the process of social inclusion. As the community develops, unused human resources and social capital can be activated.

5.3 Implications for practice and for policy

The approach of assisted self-governance, which is embedded in the CASS Community Volunteer Model, has great potential for nurturing volunteerism in both the Chinese and non-Chinese communities and in different perspectives of community resilience in the post COVID era. However, CASS as a long established and large organisation has been able to fund some of these capacity building activities with its own profits. It is important to point out that most social service providers are not in a position to do so. They do not have the capacity to develop such an elaborated incubating system. At the same time, when facing labour shortage, many smaller service providers that are crucial for the community may struggle to survive. Volunteering can be a game changer for them.

To fill in the gap, the government can potentially make changes in several directions:

1. Directly providing resources to support service wide volunteer incubators. The CASS Community Volunteer Model can be adapted to become a backbone for volunteer development practice as its assisted self-governance model is light touch and catering to cultural differences. For such initiatives, the support can be in the forms of funding, development of training packages.
2. Bridging knowledge exchange across different social service sectors, different communities and through collaborative efforts to establish service-based volunteer incubation guidance and resource platforms.
3. Follow up research can be conducted to further evaluate the cost-benefits of the incubator approach, its effectiveness, the dynamics, further improvement, and the needed adaptation of this model in other settings.

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