Information Pack for Prospective Volunteer Out & About Visitors

Community Visitors Scheme

Switchboard (Victoria) Incorporated
2017
Switchboard

Since 1991, Switchboard Victoria has provided peer based telephone counselling service to Victoria & Tasmania’s lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) community. This service was founded, run & staffed by volunteers.

Twenty-six years on, Switchboard remains a volunteer organisation providing a range of services for the LGBTI communities, the family and friends of LGBTI individuals as well as health and welfare professionals with LGBTI clients.

Out & About

Out & About is part of the national Community Visitor Scheme (CVS) program, funded by the Federal Government. The program provides companionship to socially or culturally isolated people living in Government-subsidised aged care homes or receiving a home care package in their own home. The service is provided by several community organisations or ‘auspices’, each receiving government funding.

In 2014 Switchboard Victoria secured funding to provide an LGBTI specific CVS program. Switchboard is the only program in Victoria which provides CVS visitors specifically for LGBTI people. Throughout Australia, similar LGBTI programs are provided by ACON (NSW), QuAC (QLD) and Umbrella (WA).

Why LGBTI?

LGBTI people are one of nine special needs groups identified by the federal government\(^1\). They are considered special needs due to historic and ongoing discrimination, poorer health and wellbeing outcomes, and invisibility within the aged care system.

Stigma and Discrimination

Many older LGBTI Australians have lived through a time in the nation’s history when they suffered stigma, discrimination, criminalisation, family rejection and social isolation. As a consequence of these negative views, many went to extraordinary lengths to hide their sexual orientation or gender identity to feel safe.

The ongoing impact of this discrimination includes\(^2\):

- not feeling safe disclosing their sexuality or gender identity
- current discrimination becomes a reminder of historical discrimination
- learning to be assertive to prevent discrimination
- feeling the need to straighten up or risk experiencing discrimination or a diminished standard of care

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\(^1\) Aged Care Act 1997 s 11-3

Poorer health, wellbeing

A comparison of older LGB & heterosexual people in the UK\(^3\) found that LGB people were; more likely to be single, more likely to live alone, less likely to have children, and less likely to see biological family than their heterosexual peers. LGB people also drink alcohol more often, were more likely to take drugs and more likely to have a history of mental ill health or concerns about future mental health. This combination of increased isolation & more health risk factors means that older LGBTI people are very likely to need access to aged care services.

Invisibility

A study of attitudes and current practices of retirement accommodation organisations found that 86% of facilities were unaware of any LGBTI residents\(^4\). When you consider that the LGBTI population make up 11% of the Australian population\(^5\), and aged care providers frequently have over 50 residential beds, it’s not plausible that so many providers would not have any LGBTI residents.

In the same study, 28% of providers believe their facility promotes a welcoming and accepting atmosphere for LGBTI people, however only 5% said they used any means to indicate an inclusive environment to their residents. This means that older LGBTI people may choose to remain invisible because they are unaware they would be accepted, and do not wish to risk discrimination.

Further information on this can be found here:


Videos of older LGBTI people’s experiences: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jyuAJPAYk4w](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jyuAJPAYk4w)

Who is out there?

The National LGBTI Health Alliance states “The estimated number of older LGBTI Australians over the age of 65 is expected to rise to approximately 500,000 people by the year 2051."\(^6\) However, it is currently unknown how many LGBTI people are accessing Aged care in Victoria. This is because many people choose not to come out to their aged care provider.

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\(^4\) GRAI (GLBTI Retirement Association Inc) and Curtin Health Innovation Research Institute, Curtin University. 2010. We Don’t Have Any of Those People Here: Retirement accommodation and aged care issues for non-heterosexual populations. Perth, Western Australia.


What a visit might look like?

Your visits are what you make them. The primary aim is to build community connections and reduce isolation through social activities that are mutually enjoyable. You might like to sit and chat about current affairs, walk to the local café, watch a movie together, tell each other stories from your life, or participate in a hobby, game or other activity.

Volunteer visitors are there for social activities only and should not engage in any other care activities such as shopping, cleaning or personal care. If the visit recipient needs additional assistance, they should speak to their aged care provider.

Benefits of volunteering

Some of the benefits of volunteering are:

- Developing friendships with older people
- Giving back to and supporting LGBTI community
- Enhancing a person's quality of life
- Gaining experience working with older people & aged care services
- Building connections with other volunteers
- Learning about LGBTI ageing through professional development & support sessions

Challenges of volunteering

Some of the challenges of volunteering are:

- Learning to communicate with someone who may have a different communication style
- Finding activities that are enjoyable for you both
- Managing boundaries – being able to say no when the visit recipient asks you to undertake activities that are outside your role
- Making time for regular visits

Volunteer Skills Required

As you will be working with vulnerable people, volunteers are expected to demonstrate the highest level of ethical conduct. Some of the skills required in this position are:

- A commitment to building and sustaining a friendship with an elder LGBTI person over an extended period of time
- Strong communication skills, including listening skills
- A demonstrated genuine empathy, understanding and enjoyment of the company of older LGBTI people
- Awareness and respect the recipient’s beliefs, background and culture
Demonstrated reliability and flexibility
Ability to work independently
Willing to seek advice, as appropriate
Awareness of any issues the recipient may be experiencing related to their physical or mental health
Recognition of one’s inability to ‘fix’ or ‘solve’ other people’s problems, while understanding the value of providing support

Volunteer requirements
To be a volunteer with us, you must:
- Commit to a minimum of 1 hour per week or 2 hours per fortnight for 12 months (Minimum of 20 visits annually)
- Be over 18 years of age
- Adhere to privacy, confidentiality and dignity policies
- Undergo Police Check
- Undergo training
- Know, understand and follow procedures
- Submit Monthly Reports

Limitations of the program
Due to the invisibility of LGBTI people in the aged care system, requests for visitors have been slow. At present Switchboard visit less than 20 people across Victoria. However, requests can come in at any time, and we are putting significant effort into promoting the service.

As such, we may not be able to match you up with someone immediately. We will keep your details for 12 months and contact you when we receive a visit request in your area. After 12 months, we’ll check in to see if you are still available to volunteer with us. You may also be contacted from time to time about other volunteering opportunities, or with an update on the Out & About program.
Volunteer Out & About Visitor Selection Process

Applications

You will have received an application form with this information. Please answer each question honestly and with care. Your application will be assessed by the Out & About Coordinator and you may be invited to attend an interview.

Interview

Interviews are informal and aimed at getting to know your personality, interests, experience and suitability in order to match you up with someone who has requested a visitor. Interviews are an opportunity for you to ask questions and to determine whether Switchboard is the right organisation for you.

The venue is located in the Melbourne CBD and more information will be provided should your application be accepted. Those located in regional areas can request an interview via Skype.

Interview may be one-on-one or in small groups.

Matching Process

Volunteers are matched with visit recipients based on location, interests and preferences. Although we always attempt to match those with similar interests, we’re often restricted by location. Therefore you may be matched up with someone with unlikely interests. Part of the fun is discovering something new you both enjoy!

Training

Training for Volunteer visitors comes in three parts

1. General online training
2. Specific LGBTI & Switchboard training
3. Ongoing professional development

Online Training

The online training takes approx. 1-1.5 hours and includes everything you need to know about the CVS, your responsibilities and some basic information on ageing, grief and loss, your safety and much more.

You are able to log in and out of the training as often as you like, so you do not need to complete it all in one session. You will need to complete the online training before attending your face-to-face training.

LGBTI & Switchboard training
This will be approx. 1-1.5hrs of face-to-face training. It will be completed one-on-one or in small groups with the Out & About Coordinator. These sessions will be held evenings and weekends on a regular basis. This will usually take place in Melbourne CBD. Regional and rural volunteers can have this training in their area before their first visit.

**On-going Professional Development**

Switchboard provides ongoing professional development sessions for all our active volunteers. These usually take the form of group seminars on topics of interest. We may also hold group discussion sessions where volunteer visitors can get together to discuss their experiences with other volunteer visitors. These sessions are largely held in Melbourne CBD.

**Police Check**

All Volunteers will need to complete an online police check BEFORE commencing visits. Details will be emailed to you after you have been matched. You will need to provide 100 points of ID

**First Meeting**

Your first meeting with your visit recipient will be attended by the Out & About Coordinator at a time mutually convenient for all. You will have a chance to chat with the visit recipient & get to know them for approximately one hour. After this meeting, the Coordinator will confirm with you and the visit recipient that you are both willing to proceed with ongoing visits. Once confirmed, it is your responsibility to contact the visit recipient to arranged regular meetings

**Monthly Reports**

Each month, all active visitors will be sent a link to the monthly report. It should take approximately 5 minutes to complete the dates, and any other important information about your visits. **It is important that this is completed punctually & accurately each month as our continued funding relies on these reports.**
As a Switchboard volunteer, you have the right to expect certain things from the organisation – just as the organisation has the right to expect certain things from you. Many of these below expectations are based upon key principles we try to enact in everything we do at Switchboard: personal and professional integrity, respect, confidentiality and trust.

What you can expect from Switchboard as a volunteer:

- The provision of a safe working environment;
- The provision of safeguards against harassment, bullying or belittlement in any form;
- The provision of accurate, up to date information regarding internal operations;
- Ongoing developmental opportunities including group discussions and professional development sessions;
- Clear and accessible mechanisms for the lodging of grievances and complaints;
- Support when reconsidering your contribution to the organisation (e.g. changing roles);
- Access to the meetings and records held by management;
- Access to supervision and support;
- To be valued as a team member.

What Switchboard expects from you as a volunteer:

- An ongoing commitment to providing positive outcomes for LGBTI communities;
- A willingness to seek and use information and deliver the best service possible;
- A firm commitment to completing at least two visits a month for 12 months;
- A firm commitment to accurately record and submit monthly reports about your visits;
- If you cannot attend you visit, you notify your visit recipient or the aged care provider as soon as possible.
- That you will be on time for your visits;
- That you communicate any changes in your availability and commitment as soon as possible;
- That you communicate any difficulties you may be having with the visit recipient to the Out & About Coordinator;
- That you pay attention to internal communications and respond in a timely fashion where necessary;
- That you are familiar with and adhere to organisational policies and procedures.

Switchboard’s Funding and Obligations
Our federal funding requires us to meet several obligations. If these obligations are not met, we risk losing our funding and the program may cease to exist. Our main obligations are:

- To visit 65 older LGBTI people annually
- Provide a minimum of 20 visits per person annually
- Only visit people who are receiving a Home Care Package (coordinated package of in-home services), or living in government funded residential care.
- Police check all our staff and volunteers

As a volunteers with us, it’s important that you help us meet these obligations.
Telephone counselling & QLife

In November 2011, Switchboard joined the five existing gay and lesbian telephone counselling services around Australia to form the national network now known as QLife. QLife operates from 3.00pm to 12 midnight, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. Volunteer telephone counsellors are available by calling the national telephone number: 1800 184 527, and online counsellors and an email response service are available via the website: www.qlife.org.au

If you would like more information on volunteering for our telephone counselling service, please contact Emily at volunteering@switchboard.org.au

Switchboard Committee of Management

Switchboard is governed by a Committee of Management (CoM) elected by Switchboard’s membership each year at the Annual General Meeting (AGM).

The elected officers are:

- President
- Vice President
- Secretary
- Treasurer
- Executive Member
- General Members

The CoM sets the strategic direction for Switchboard and takes responsibility for ensuring the organisation fulfils its legal, contractual, ethical and financial obligation.

CoM members are telephone counselling, Out & About and other volunteers who have been part of Switchboard for at least 12 months. New CoM members are elected by Switchboard volunteers at the Annual General Meeting (AGM) usually held in September or October.

Other Roles

There are many other ways to volunteer with Switchboard. Switchboard is always looking for ways to expand the service’s activities and reach. Other ongoing roles include:

- Fundraising
- Events
- Research
- Policy development
- Administration
- Training and resource development
- Special projects

Once you have completed the training course you will receive regular communication from Switchboard staff detailing available opportunities. If you have any specific skills or experience in these areas, please let us know.

**Switchboard Staff**

Switchboard has three staff members who support our volunteers, elevate switchboards profile & ensure switchboard’s financial future.

- General Manager (full-time)
- Volunteer Coordinator, Counselling (part-time)
- Out & About Coordinator (part-time)

Switchboard also uses the services of an external Counselling Supervisor who is responsible for the delivery of a comprehensive group supervision program for volunteer telephone counsellors.