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## CASE STUDY

# UnitingCare Queensland

## BACKGROUND

Established in the early 20th century as an integral part of Community Outreach facilitated through local congregations, UnitingCare has a steadfast commitment to fostering a community where individuals can "live life in all its fullness". At the heart of their organisation, the Volunteer Experience Team is dedicated to assisting their volunteers and supervisors in adhering to best practices, harnessing the capabilities of Better Impact, operating within their volunteer framework, and supporting recruitment efforts. They offer a diverse range of services, including Lifeline Retail shops, the Lifeline Crisis Support hotline, Lifeline Bookfest, four hospitals, Blue Care Aged Care Facility and Community Support, Mission support through Chaplaincy, and Family and Disability Services, with over 8,000 volunteers throughout Queensland, Australia.

UnitingCare is a pivotal part of the UnitingCare Australia network, one of the nation's largest providers of social services, impacting 1.4 million people annually with a dedicated staff of over 50,000. They've maintained this commitment for over a century, striving for a better world and advocating for social justice across party lines, drawing on insights from their network and the people they serve. This mission-driven environment positions UnitingCare Australia as a leading advocate for social justice, committed to a brighter, more equitable future for all Australians.

Victoria Bansey, Better Impact Volunteer Experience Lead at UnitingCare, became a member of the team in November 2019. Her professional background encompasses IT and Multimedia Design, with prior experience successfully implementing Better Impact for a Refugee Program in South-East Queensland. Victoria was particularly enthusiastic about taking on the task of introducing Better Impact within a sizeable, values-driven organisation.

**Before making the transition to Better Impact, the organisation primarily relied on an antiquated Access database which was continually at risk of being phased out and a multitude of spreadsheets for volunteer management.**

## CHALLENGES

The organisation faced several challenges prior to transitioning to Better Impact. "There were a lot of spreadsheets!" recalls Victoria. Their use led to considerable data duplication across various services, which resulted in a skewed perception of their volunteer count. Due to the lack of a maintained VMS the organisation estimated it had volunteer numbers over 9,000. With the introduction of Better Impact we embarked on a data cleanse which told us that we have fewer than 5,000 volunteers.

In 2019, after DJ Cronin became manager of the Volunteer Experience Team, he noticed that there were three areas that needed particular attention in the organisation. First was the volunteer management system. The other two were a Volunteer Framework for the Organisation as well as a Recruitment Plan.

## Key Pain Points:

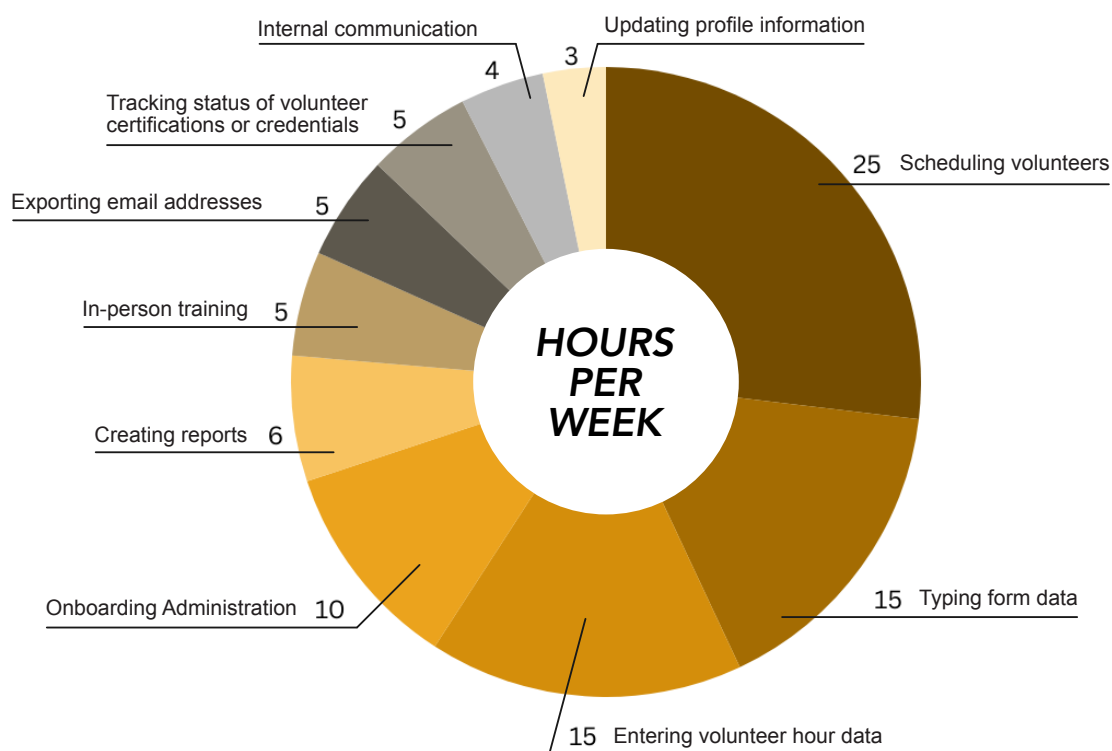
- **Struggle to oversee diverse operations** such as hospitals, Op Shops, large events, Crisis Hotline, and Family and Disability Services due to the extensive geographical dispersion across Queensland and the Northern Territory.
- **Event coordination for the semi-annual Lifeline Bookfest** in Brisbane became labour-intensive, with communication challenges for 1,500 shifts involving 700 volunteers relying on postal letters. Staff managed responses via phone or return mail, and shift assignments were tracked manually on a spreadsheet, significantly impacting staff productivity in the three months leading up to the event.
- **The reliance on paperwork contributed to frequent outdated information**, leading to supervisors working with incorrect details and volunteers experiencing difficulties.

*“Not having a proper Volunteer Management Software (VMS) in place had a huge impact on the organisation. It was difficult to accurately report volunteer numbers and hours. It also meant it was difficult to respond agilely to any changes with forms, probity or learning requirements.”*

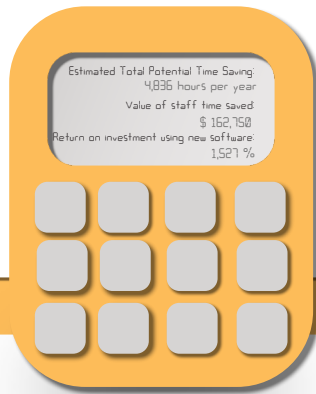
*- Victoria Bansey, Better Impact Volunteer Experience Lead*



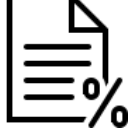
When Victoria used the [ROI Calculator](#) to determine how much time was being spent operating in this manner, it revealed that she was going to save around **4,836 hours** per year on tasks that could be automated via a volunteer management software solution.

**Here’s a breakdown on how much time was spent in various tasks before using Better Impact:**



## ROI Calculator Data



Hours Saved	Value of Time	ROI
 4,836	 \$162,750	 1,527%

## JOURNEY

UnitingCare embarked on its journey to explore a VMS in June 2019. This endeavour involved key stakeholders within the organisation, including the Manager, Volunteer Advisor, and Senior Leadership as part of the 2030 program.

The process of selecting a VMS was a carefully orchestrated one. The Volunteer Experience Team conducted a comprehensive assessment of available options in the market, scrutinizing various VMS offerings. After thorough deliberation and consensus among the team, the decision was made to choose Better Impact as the preferred VMS solution. Following this decision, a compelling case was compiled and presented to the 2030 Panel, which subsequently granted its approval. The proposal was then elevated to the UnitingCare Executive, where it received final approval.

This meticulous and structured approach ensured that the selection of the VMS aligned with the organisation's strategic goals and met the needs of the Volunteer Experience team and the broader UnitingCare community. During this exploration, the organisation considered and evaluated approximately five different VMS before deciding on Better Impact as the most suitable choice for their requirements.

*“After much research and investigation, in which UnitingCare carefully considered and evaluated approximately five different VMS options, Better Impact was chosen.”*

*- Victoria Bansey, Better Impact Volunteer Experience Lead*

## Implementation

UnitingCare implemented Better Impact in February 2020.

Given the organisation's extensive and diverse scope, determining the optimal approach for implementing Better Impact has proven to be a complex endeavour. Several factors came into play, including varying levels of IT proficiency and capabilities, access to Wi-Fi, and a general resistance to change.

These challenges were encountered by a range of stakeholders within the organisation, with some experiencing gradual and consistent progress while others wholeheartedly embraced Better Impact and seamlessly incorporated it into their operations.

The transition to Better Impact represented a significant shift for many volunteer supervisors who were accustomed to a primarily paper-based system, according to Victoria. While it took time for some areas to fully integrate the system and grow comfortable with it, the response from volunteers has largely been positive and they have risen to the occasion and embraced these changes. Victoria emphasizes the critical role played by the supervisors, whose attitude and guidance facilitated a smooth transition.

## Why Volunteer Impact

UnitingCare's decision to choose Volunteer Impact over any alternative VMS solution was guided by three key factors:

- 1. There were multiple recommendations received by the UnitingCare team from other members of the volunteer management community regarding Better Impact.** These recommendations carried significant weight and reinforced the reliability and effectiveness of Better Impact within the volunteer management sphere.
- 2. The cost-effectiveness of Better Impact was a decisive factor. It was evident that Better Impact provided the most value for money within the volunteer sector,** encompassing vital aspects such as security, uptime, and support. This combination of affordability and a robust support system made Better Impact a standout choice.
- 3. The ability to seamlessly transfer existing data** from pre-existing sources into Better Impact simplified the decision-making process.

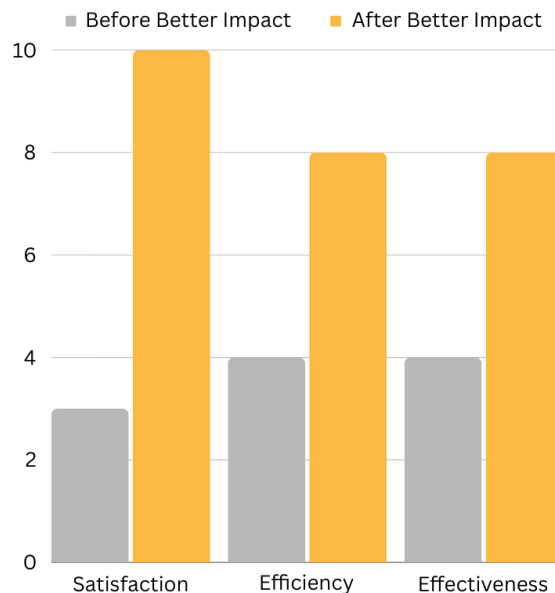
*"Strong recommendations from the Volunteer Management Community about Better Impact, were a big factor in choosing Better Impact."*

*- Victoria Bansey, Better Impact Volunteer Experience Lead*

## Lessons Learned

UnitingCare recognised the need for additional assistance to successfully implement Better Impact on a broad and diverse scale. DJ Cronin, Volunteer Experience Manager explains "we employed a resource with expertise in Better Impact as with the scale of our organisation it would never have been possible to implement Better Impact (or any other VMS) without this. There simply wasn't the time for the pre-existing team to do that across all the different elements of UnitingCare".

## RESULTS



Victoria has words of encouragement for Volunteer Managers: “look for something that can demonstrate the impact of your volunteers which is what Better Impact does for us at UnitingCare.”

**With the help of Better Impact managing the quantitative data and the time saved, the organisation has now been able to produce, for the first time, a groundbreaking Volunteer Impact Report for 2023.** This annual report marks a significant milestone in capturing the profound impact of volunteering on UnitingCare's staff, clients, and volunteers themselves. The transition to Better Impact has not only improved data management but also empowered UnitingCare to articulate and quantify the substantial contributions of their volunteers, enabling more informed decision-making and fostering a deeper understanding of their mission's attainment.

Moreover, Victoria stresses the importance of involving supervisors, administrators, and volunteers in this transformative process. She suggests “work with them on how to bring their processes forward with Better Impact rather than just thrusting it upon them and expecting them to figure it out. Sometimes that will take time to embed. It has taken time to win some sceptics over who are now its strongest champion.”

Ultimately, the organisation can now keep a better eye on volunteer hours in areas they previously couldn't track. This transition marks a big step forward in volunteer management, highlighting the importance of flexible implementation strategies suited to their diverse operations. With clearer data and improved oversight, they've successfully addressed earlier challenges and made their volunteer management more efficient.

*“I have recently taken on the task of creating a Volunteer Impact Report. 2023 will be the first in an annual report of this nature where we capture the impact of volunteering on the UnitingCare staff, clients and the volunteers themselves. This would not have been possible without Better Impact taking the burden of many parts of volunteer maintenance.”*

*- Victoria Bansey, Better Impact Volunteer Experience Lead*

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