

The Generational Impact of Volunteering: A Look at the Xavier Social Justice Network

Introduction

The Xavier Social Justice Network (XSJN) stands as a testament to the enduring power of community service, advocacy and volunteerism. Grounded in a rich tradition of faith and action, the XSJN has engaged families, fostered leadership, and created lasting connections within the community. As the Network celebrates its 20th anniversary, it's essential to reflect on its history, achievements, and aspirations for the future.

A Family-Centred Approach

At the heart of XSJN's ethos is the belief in family involvement and influence. Growing up in an environment that values volunteering has profound implications for children. Families participating together in outreach activities and social justice events not only strengthen their bonds but also instil a sense of responsibility and empathy in the younger generation. The XSJN encourages this engagement, allowing families to witness their faith in action through practical expressions of service and in advocacy of social justice issues. Role modelling these values for their children is an important aspect of the XSJN for many parents.

Community Engagement

The XSJN embodies Ignatian spirituality and demonstrates how it translate into tangible community action. This concept extends beyond the walls of the College, impacting families and the broader community. From the early days of the XSJN there has been strong leadership and clear strategic planning, to ensure that the Mission and Vision were embedded into the fabric of the College and the community it serves. The new Strategic Plan has recently been launched and can be found on [this link](#).

The Generational Impact of Volunteering

Volunteering has a generational ripple effect. As parents model the importance of service, their children are likely to adopt these values, fostering a culture of giving that spans generations. This grassroots experience shapes attitudes, creating a legacy of Xavier students who become influential community members. The emphasis on role modelling is crucial, as parents demonstrate the importance of empathy and social responsibility.

The Evolving Landscape of Volunteering

Looking ahead, the future of volunteering within the XSJN is expanding to pro-bono work, where individuals leverage their professional skills to support governance, administration and time-limited projects. While the nature of volunteering may evolve, maintaining grassroots connections with

marginalised people at the coalface remains vital. The focus on relationships and ongoing engagement is important to ensure that the spirit of volunteering continues to thrive and people are drawn together in shared experience, creating a sense of community.

Successful Programs and Initiatives

The XSJN has played a pivotal role in many successful initiatives, including the establishment of the Education First Youth Foyer in Broadmeadows ten years ago, which is managed by Launch Housing. Driven by an idea of one parent at Xavier College and a commitment to supporting young people experiencing homelessness, this program has transformed the lives of many young individuals through the mentoring program. Volunteer mentors from the XSJN, many from diverse professional backgrounds, have become invaluable role models to the young people from the Foyer, as well as have been enriched through their witnessing of the resilience and strength of these young people. The Vinnies Soup Van Program is another wonderful successful partnership that the XSJN has had over many years, which is attributed mostly to the long-standing late Soup Van leader, Leo Holt. The XSJN not only provided many volunteers to the Soup Vans, but also purchased a Soup Van vehicle for the Collingwood Soup Van and instigated the 'donate a night on the Soup Van' raising significant funds for the running of the Soup Vans. Parents and OX continue to volunteer on the Soup Vans regularly.

Overcoming Challenges and Looking Forward

Despite challenges, including the impact of COVID-19 on volunteer participation, the XSJN continues to adapt and thrive. With a commitment to flexibility and innovative program offerings, the network ensures ongoing engagement for all ages. The importance of building relationships, shared experiences, and a strong sense of community remains a cornerstone of XSJN's approach.

Conclusion: A Vision for the Future

As the XSJN celebrates two decades of service, it reflects on its foundations, achievements, and future aspirations. The network's success lies in its ability to adapt to changing volunteer landscapes while remaining responsive to community needs through its partnership with a dozen various agencies. The hopes and dreams for the next 20 years focus on attracting new members, ensuring viability, continuing to work out of the Ignatian tradition and putting faith in action. Through the new five-year Strategic Plan and a commitment to its Mission and Values, the XSJN is poised to foster a culture of community service and advocacy that will resonate for generations to come.