



Volunteer Round Up: 2022-2023 Program Year

Words Alive
770 Park Blvd, San Diego, CA 92101
www.WordsAlive.org
(858) 274-9673

An Engaged, Mission-Driven Community of Readers

REPRESENTATION MATTERS

At Words Alive, we envision a world where everyone is connected to the power of reading and the innumerable ways it enriches our lives. We also know that empowering experiences turn individuals into agents of change and advocates for their own education, which is made possible through the act of reading together.

A book helps you understand the story of someone different than you. At the same time, stories have the power to reflect our own experiences back at us and tell us: We are not alone.

Words Alive values our community's life experiences, cultural background, gender identity, socioeconomic statuses, and faith and beliefs. This is reflected through our programming and curriculum; governance and policies; leadership, staff, and volunteers; partnerships and collaborations; and through the work we do every day to advance our mission.

At the end of the calendar year, Words Alive takes a close look at the demographics of our volunteer community to identify opportunities to continue to support our community and become more deeply aligned and congruent. The data reflected in this report was collected throughout the 2022-2023 program year. This report's release date is January 2024.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATIONS TO CONSIDER

- Our volunteer corps is growing more diverse in regards to race, age, and educational background but does not yet reflect the communities we serve. In 2024, Words Alive should aim to recruit more male and Latinx volunteers, particularly for student and family-facing roles to engage directly with the communities we serve.
- 45% of new volunteers recruited between July 2022 and June 2023 were under 25 years old. This is on pace with prior year trends. We should continue to develop methods of recruiting youth volunteers (12 -18 years old), especially that representative of the communities we serve. Words Alive's array of virtual volunteer opportunities may be particularly appealing to young volunteers with limited time and transportation for in-person opportunities.
- Words Alive is proud that 15% of our volunteer base identify as LGBTQIA, especially considering that 9% of the student population in San Diego Unified School District identify as LGBTQIA.

NOTABLE TRENDS FROM 2023

- 45% of volunteers recruited in the 2022-2023 program year were under the age of 25, taking our multi-year average to 52%. We believe our expansion of the number and type virtual roles and the schedule flexibility they provide appeal to younger volunteers. Additionally, over the past year Words Alive developed partnerships with youth organizations dedicated to volunteerism such as Teen Volunteers in Action, MANA de San Diego, and Justice League of Congregation Beth Israel. The next step would be to reach into the neighborhoods of the schools that we serve to recruit youth volunteers that are representative of our program participants.
- While 66% of our program participants identify as Hispanic/Latinx, only 12% of our volunteers identify similarly. Individuals who identify as Black/African American represent 11% of our program participants, and just 5% of our volunteer base.

RECRUITMENT & ONBOARDING

- Our work onboarding new volunteers continues to evolve. Recently, we have developed and implemented a "Words Matter" training, which encourages volunteers to use asset-based techniques throughout their volunteer work, such as inclusive language surrounding gender, LGBTQIA identification, and socioeconomic circumstance.

HOURS

- Between July 1, 2022, and June 30, 2023, Words Alive engaged 1,083 volunteers who contributed a total of 5,914 hours. According to the Independent Sector, the value of their contributions exceeds \$188,065.

NOTES & FUTURE REPORTING

Words Alive began collecting volunteer demographic data in 2020; therefore, volunteer demographics from our founding in 1999 through 2020 are unavailable for analysis. Additionally, volunteers who solely participate in Page Turners and episodic service events are not required to complete a volunteer application, so we are unable to include their demographic information in this report.

This report is produced in collaboration with Words Alive's Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility (IDEA) Taskforce, consisting of Board members, staff, and volunteers.

The next report will be issued at the end of the 2024 calendar year.

For any questions about this report and its data, or opportunities to join our movement to connect young people to the power of reading, please do not hesitate to contact us info@wordsalive.org or 858-274-9673. Learn more about our work: www.WordsAlive.org.

Aggregate Survey Data (January 2020 – June 2023)

A LOOK AT THE AGGREGATE DATA ABOUT THE WORDS ALIVE COMMUNITY

This data includes all survey responses spanning 36 months - from January 1, 2020, through June 30th, 2023, with updated information on age, gender, race, and education level. Military status, disability, and LGBTQIA identification were added at the beginning of 2021.

This section of the report is meant to provide Words Alive staff, lead volunteers, organizational leadership, and investors with a look at the results of recruitment efforts around inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility. It is meant to be used as a flashlight to look at the results of the work we are doing and provide directionality for next steps as an organization.

Some recommendations, reflections, and thoughts on our growing edge – the space where we believe we have the strongest potential to grow even amidst the initial discomfort it may cause – are included with the intention to continue to help us develop in this space.

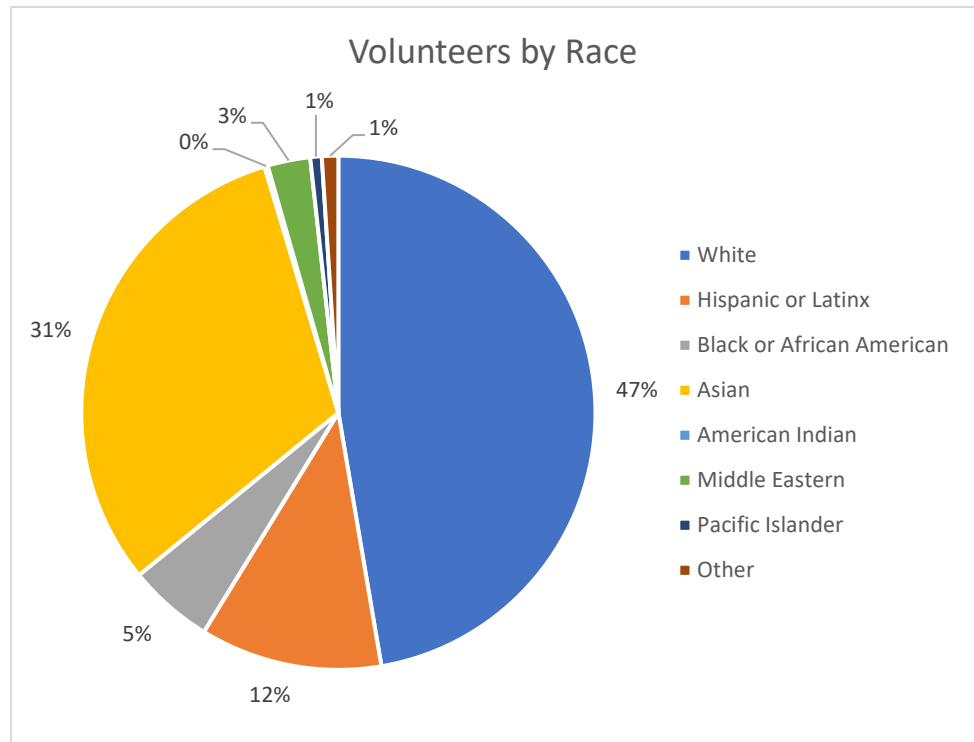
At Words Alive, it is important to us that the demographics of our volunteer base reflect the community we serve. Here is how we are doing today.

RACE

Since Words Alive last collected demographics information in 2022, we have seen that the percentage of Middle Eastern-identified volunteers increased from 3% to 6% in the last 30 months. The percentage of Asian-identified volunteers remained stable, whereas Black/African American, Hispanic/Latinx, and White-identified volunteers slightly decreased during this same time. We continue to have a very small (less than 1%) portion of our volunteers who identify as Native American or Pacific Islander.

Date Range: 7/1/2022-6/30/2023

- N = 970
- 47% of respondents identify as White.
- 34% of respondents identify as Asian.
- 11% of respondents identify as Hispanic or Latinx.
- 16 respondents listed 'biracial' or 'multiracial' without additional information and are not reflected in this graph.



Category	% of Student/Family Population	% of Volunteer Population
White	10%	47%
Hispanic or Latinx	66%	12%
Black or African American	11%	5%
Asian	5%	31%
American Indian	1%	>1%
Middle Eastern	1%	3%
Pacific Islander	1%	1%
Other	1%	1%

Implications. We continue to better align our volunteer representation with the population we serve; however, more progress is needed. Over four years of volunteer data, the percentage of volunteers not identified as White has remained stagnant. The largest area for improvement is recruiting volunteers from the Hispanic/Latinx community.

Growing Edge. Recruitment for child/family-facing volunteer roles should prioritize recruiting individuals of diverse racial backgrounds, particularly volunteers who identify as Black/African American and Hispanic/Latinx. To increase racial diversity of volunteers working with children, Words Alive should target outreach events in the communities we serve, building genuine connections and relationships with those already invested in the communities. As an organization dedicated to working in partnership, Words Alive should prioritize connecting with groups serving these communities, such as schools, parenting groups, youth mentorship organizations, academic enrichment events, and community

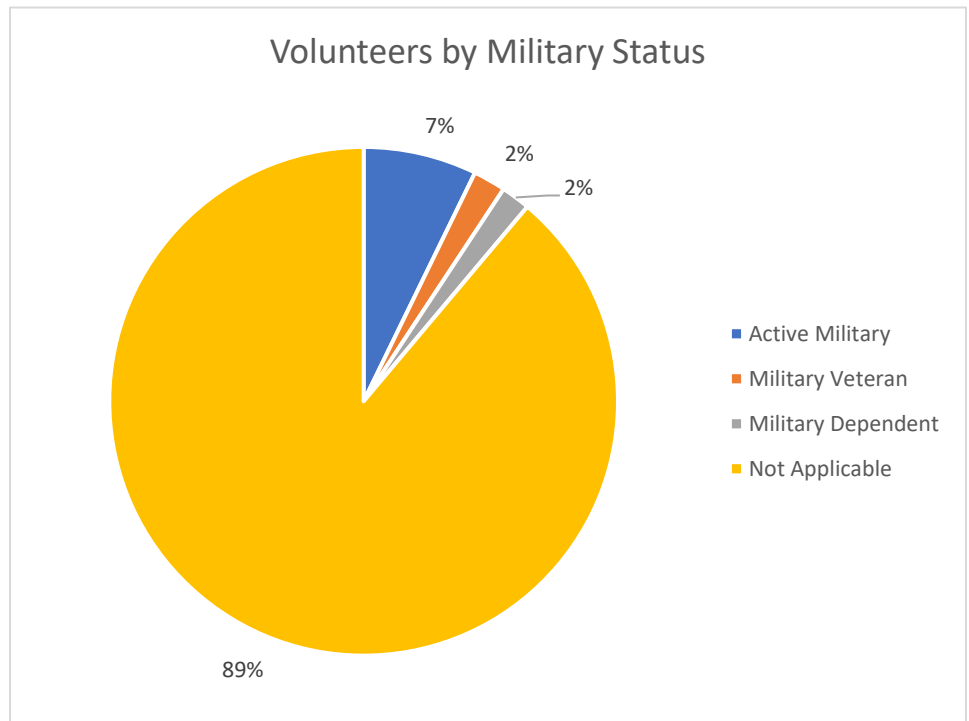
development organizations. We could eliminate accessibility hurdles by providing orientations, training materials, and recruitment materials in the languages that the families we support speak at home.

MILITARY STATUS

There are approximately 125,000 military families in San Diego County. San Diego County has one of the largest military bases in California, Camp Pendleton. Actively targeting this demographic for volunteer recruitment would increase representation for the students in military families served through Words Alive’s programming.

Date Range: 7/1/2022-6/1/2023

- N = 485
- 9% are active-duty military or veterans.
- Questions about military status were added mid-January 2021.
- Not applicable refers to respondents who answered the question but were not active military, veterans, or military dependents.



Category	% of Student/Family Population	% of Volunteer Population
Active Military	1%	7%
Military Veteran	N/A	2%
Military Dependent	1%	2%
Not Applicable	98%	89%

Implications. Currently, we partner with SAY San Diego, through which we serve 60 active-duty military families, which includes one child and at least one adult (120+ individuals). Executing a greater expansion into North County San Diego can contribute to a greater recruitment of military volunteers, since that region of San Diego has a heavy military presence.

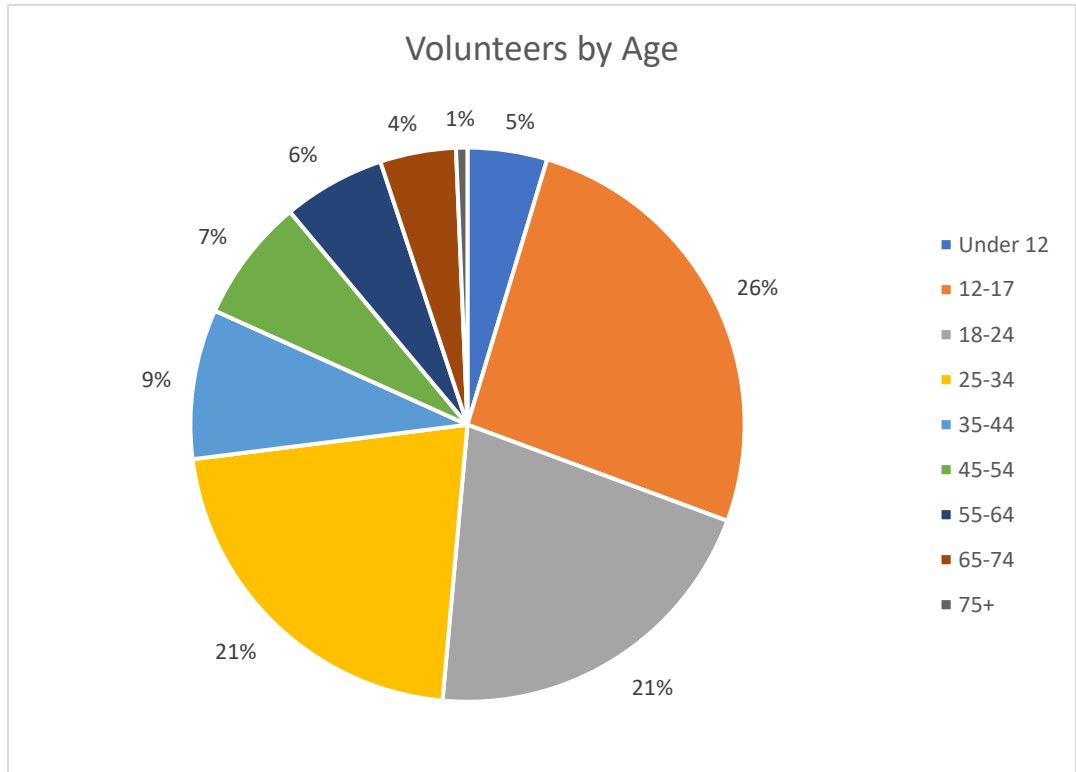
Growing Edge. The concentration of military in San Diego County means there is room for growth in this area. Building relationships with partners such as Support the Enlisted Project (STEP) and the United Service Organizations (USO) and providing recruitment materials could be a good on-ramp to bring in more military volunteers. Recently, Words Alive has expanded our military volunteer base through a partnership with the chaplain on a naval ship home ported in San Diego. At least once a month, active-duty members aboard the ship will dedicate a few hours of their time to volunteering at Words Alive’s office.

AGE

When Words Alive began collecting volunteer demographic data in 2020, the commonly held perception that our volunteers were primarily retiree age was shattered. We now know that the majority of volunteers recruited over the past three years are under 25.

Date Range: 7/1/2022-6/30/2023

- N = 904
- 52% are under 25 years old.



Implications. As the data shows, we have a rapidly expanding youth demographic (25 and under). Words Alive's youth (25 and younger) volunteer base continues to expand rapidly. Recruitment of volunteers 35 and older has remained stable since 2020.

Growing Edge. Our volunteers span five generations, providing a breadth of life experiences and expertise. The prominence of younger voices contributes to the significance and credibility of Words Alive's mission. However, there is room to be more intentional in the manner that we best utilize youth volunteers.

Meaningful virtual volunteer roles, particularly self-paced roles, can accommodate the school and extracurricular schedules of youth volunteers. Moreover, as an organization dedicated to youth development, we recognize the importance of having a youth perspective in virtual roles like Page Turners, Curriculum Crew, and Social Media Crew.

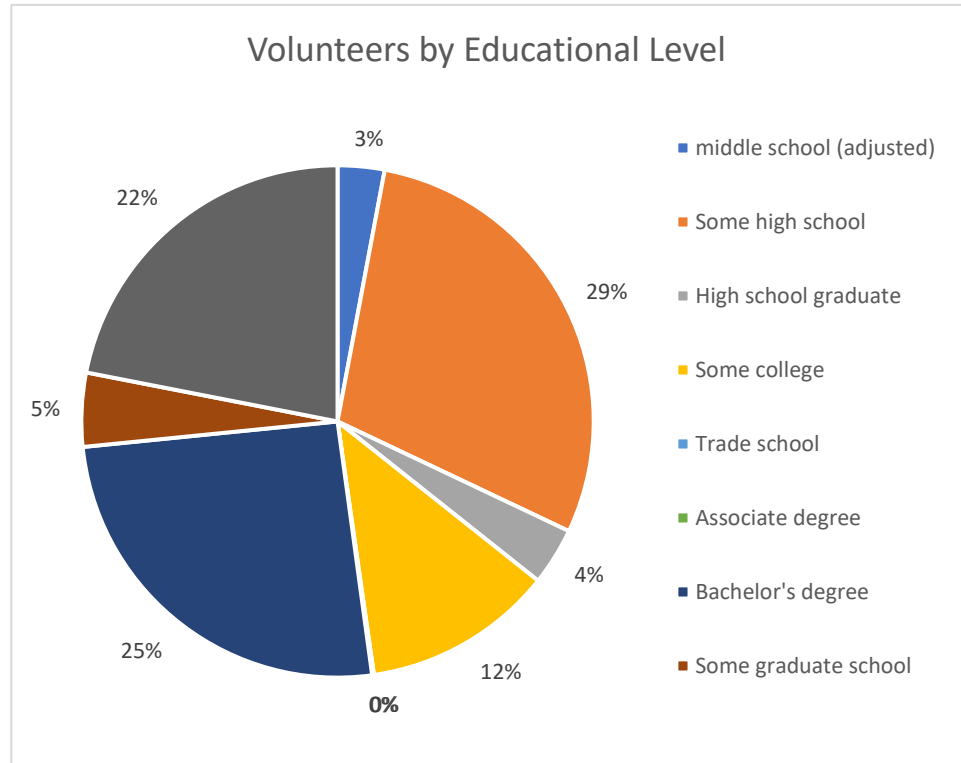
Moreover, an area we can better develop in is the recruitment of volunteers over the age of 35, especially to serve in a classroom-based capacity. This is significant because most youth volunteers are unable to serve in classrooms due to time and transportation restraints. Furthermore, it is ideal to have volunteers with the ability to control their own schedules as well as a great amount of developmental experience to be role models. Existing volunteers invested in Words Alive's mission through learning kit-packing service events may be interested in deepening their involvement by volunteering in a youth-facing role. Another recruitment method is to carry out outreach events, aimed at parents and other adults, in the schools that we serve and the surrounding neighborhoods.

EDUCATION

Over the past year, 32% of our new volunteers are currently in high school, while 25% have completed their undergraduate education.

Date Range: 7/1/2022-6/30/2023

- N = 880
- 29% of respondents have some high school education as their highest level of education.
- The middle school (adjusted) category was introduced in 2022.
- Aggregate data reflects that 3% of new volunteers since 2021 are in middle school. According to this year's aggregate data, it remains at 3%.
- 5% of volunteers have some graduate-level education or have completed graduate/professional degrees.



Implications. According to the data, 48% of our volunteer demographics are not college educated, or fully college educated, while 52% have educations ranging from associate degrees to graduate/professional degrees. As an organization dedicated to promoting diversity, equity, and inclusivity, we are pleased the data demonstrates one's educational background is not an essential factor when it comes to volunteerism. A way we can grow is by recruiting more volunteers with higher levels of education who reflect other demographic traits of the communities we serve. By having such volunteers in an in-person capacity, we can find greater success in promoting reading as a tool for future educational success.

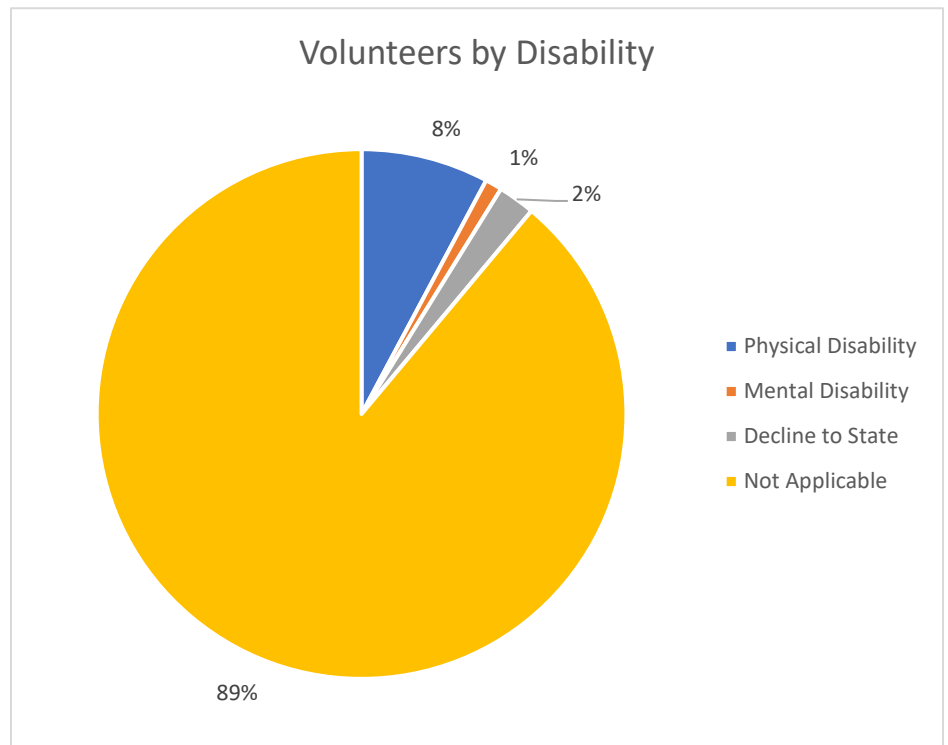
Growing Edge. To ensure accessibility for the broadest range of volunteers across educational backgrounds, we should use clear, direct language in our written materials and communications. The content that we produce and implement into our programming is greatly influenced by our volunteers. By expanding recruitment to middle and high schools closest to the neighborhoods we serve, we can better align the demography of our volunteers to reflect the lived experiences of the children and families to whom we dedicate our service.

DISABILITY

Words Alive is dedicated to connecting children, teens, and families of all lived experiences and abilities to the power of reading. Like military status, comparing this data to available student data could inform future recruitment strategy.

Date range: 7/1/2022-6/30/2023

- N= 487
- 8% of respondents reported having a physical disability.
- 1% of respondents reported having a mental disability.
- 2% of respondents declined to state.
- Not applicable refers to respondents who answered the question but do not identify as having a physical or mental disability.



Implications. Increasing accessibility in our programming, program delivery, and volunteer roles and responsibilities removes barriers preventing individuals with disabilities from volunteer service and help us recruit more volunteers who identify as having a physical or mental disability.

Growing Edge. In December 2022, Words Alive was gifted a permanent home in the East Village of downtown San Diego. With the workspaces, inventory space, volunteer collaboration area, loading zone, and garage all on the first floor, our new office is much more accessible to volunteers with physical disabilities. Additionally, we are excited to now be located along major public transit lines, increasing accessibility to volunteers who do not drive.

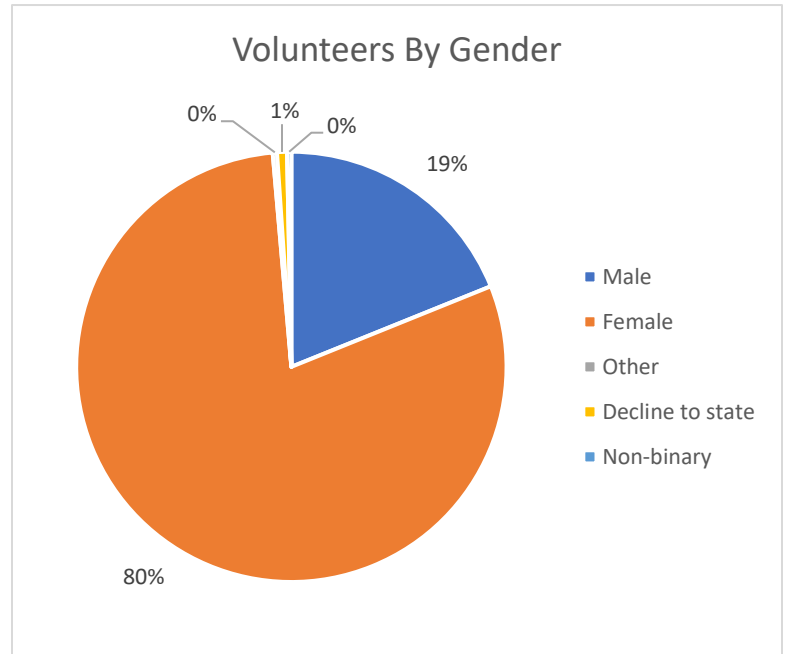
Developing partnerships with organizations or programs dedicated to assisting individuals with disabilities is a recommended recruitment strategy. This includes university disability service offices, local independent living centers, rehabilitation organizations, adaptive recreation programs, parent organizations, and special education departments or schools. Additionally, all staff and volunteers would benefit from training dedicated to disability inclusivity and education about anti-discrimination policies regarding disabilities. Furthermore, this training should be developed and/or hosted by individuals from the relevant community.

GENDER

Since Words Alive began asking volunteers to self-report gender identity in early 2020, gender demographics among our volunteers have remained relatively stable.

Date Range: 7/1/2022-6/30/2023

- N = 937
- Three respondents identified as other, and seven declined to state their gender.



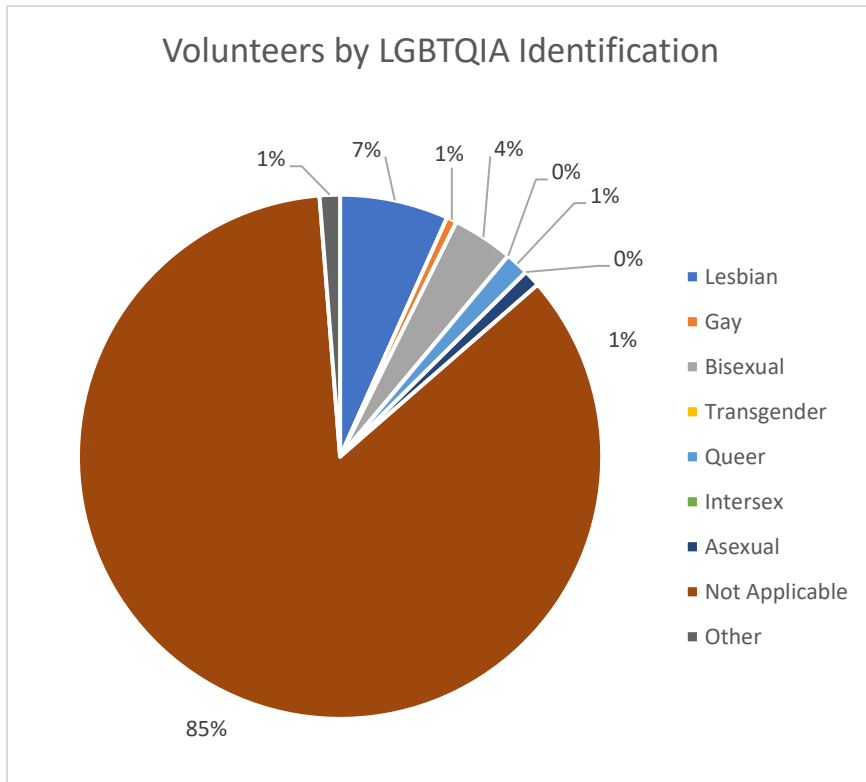
Category	% of Student/Family Population	% of Volunteer Population
Male	40%	19%
Female	54%	80%
Non-Binary	0%	>1%
Other	0%	>1%
Decline to State	0%	>1%

Implications. The representation of male-identifying volunteers is significantly lower than our participant demography, while the reverse is true for female-identifying volunteers. The recruitment of male volunteers is essential, especially for child-facing volunteer roles. Many of the communities we serve are historically underserved, and as a result many of the individuals, especially young boys, are vulnerable to negative social influences. To increase engagement and impactful change, we should prioritize recruiting volunteers from male-centered/representative organizations like Big Brothers, Big Sisters, fraternal organizations, and parent-student organizations.

Growing Edge. Adhering to our mission of inclusivity, Words Alive has normalized strategies like introductions with pronouns in email signatures, meetings, trainings (which covers the importance of pronoun and name usage with students, volunteers, and community members), and programming. The organization should prioritize recruiting male volunteers, particularly reading role models, to align with student representation. Recently, we developed a partnership with the SD4 Chapter of Teen Volunteers in Action (TVIA), a service organization for young men. By expanding outreach to other local chapters, we can increase the number of male volunteers.

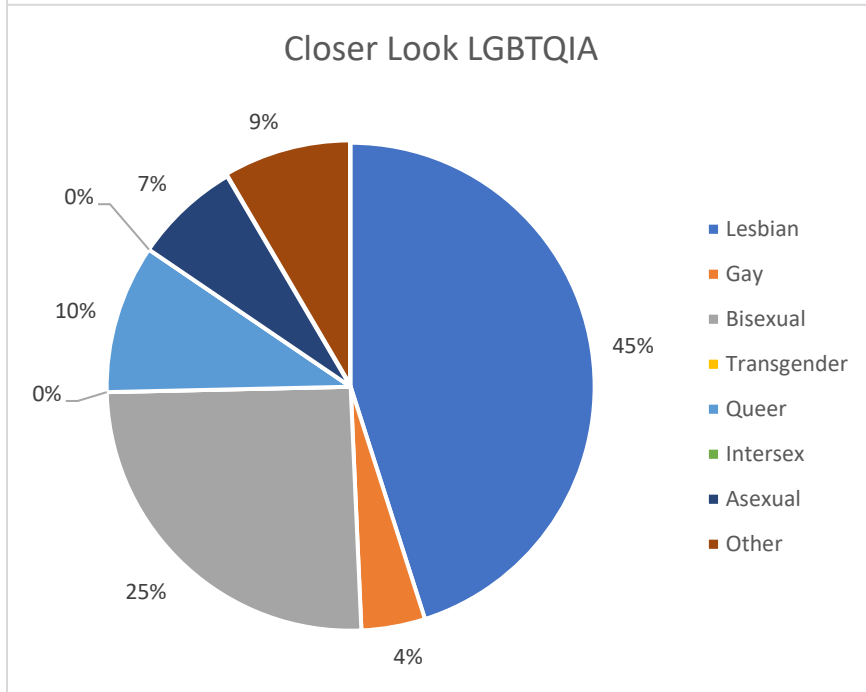
LGBTQIA IDENTIFICATION

Words Alive is committed to representing authentic voices in classroom programming, curriculum development, and volunteer representation. According to the Public Policy Institute of California, approximately 9% of all adults in California, and closer to 20% of young adults (ages 18-29), identify as LGBTQIA. San Diego Unified School District reports that just over 9% of the student population identifies as LGBTQIA.



Date Range: 7/1/2022-6/30/23

- N = 478
- 71 respondents identified as LGBTQIA.
- 85% of respondents selected “not applicable” in response to this question.



- N = 71
- Of the 15% of respondents who identify as LGBTQIA, this is a closer look at how they identify.

Although information related to LGBTQIA identification is collected on a voluntary basis from our volunteers, we do not collect this information from the students or families that we serve.

Implications. Words Alive is proud that 15% of volunteer respondents identify as LGBTQIA, speaking to our success in authentic community building and dedicated outreach.

The LGBTQIA community has a documented struggle regarding representation in the media and public spaces. We focus our attention on LGBTQIA-inclusive content in book selection and curriculum. Additionally, we have seen a continuous increase in our demography of LGBTQIA volunteers. According to aggregate data from the last two reports, the percentage of LGBTQIA identifying volunteers was at 12% in both years. To maintain our edge in this space, we should continue to foster partnerships with organizations that are dedicated to the LGBTQIA community.

Growing Edge. Words Alive is a unique organization with a high emphasis on inclusivity that provides an opportunity to develop authentic relationships with local LGBTQIA organizations and strengthen our volunteer recruitment. In the last year, we have introduced “Words Matter” training as a mandatory onboarding requirement for new classroom and curriculum volunteers and are rolling out the training to the larger Words Alive volunteer base. “Words Matter” supports volunteers in practicing asset-based tools and strategies, including inclusive language and appropriate use of pronouns.