

## The Future of Volunteering in Aged and Community Care

Tips to attract and retain Volunteers into the future



May 2017



## Foreword

In a time of enormous change for the aged and community care sector, the absolute importance of volunteers to optimum service delivery remains a constant. The extraordinary contribution made by these people (so generous with their time and skills) positively impacts the organisations they work within, the clients they support and their own lives.

Unfortunately, for the first time in almost twenty years, the number of people volunteering in Australia is in decline. The Australian Bureau of Statistics' General Social Survey shows 31% of the adult population volunteering in 2014, down from 36% in 2012. Closer to home, the 2016 Volunteering in South Australia report prepared for the Office for Volunteers shows the proportion of South Australians engaged in formal volunteering at a ten-year low (42% in 2016 against 51% in 2006) – and a consistently downward trend in between.

Aged & Community Services SA & NT first published this report in 2014. The objective was to provide our members with sector-specific information, which could assist the development of volunteering programs that meet the needs of volunteers, organisations and, most importantly, aged and community care clients. The document has been well-used by our members. The purpose of this 2017 revision is not to tamper with the initial findings, but rather to again ensure our members have the information they need (with current statistics and references) to compete in an environment of declining volunteering trends coupled with an abundance of innovative and agile volunteering programs 'out there'.

I would like to acknowledge the 2014 Project Team for their guidance and commitment to the original project and the managers, coordinators and volunteers who gave so freely of their time and thoughts.



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# Introduction

The aged and community care sector is fortunate to have thousands of volunteers contributing their time and skills on a daily basis to enhance the lives of older people and younger people with disabilities. The contribution made by volunteers has enriched the programs and services provided by paid staff and added those difficult to describe – but deeply felt – elements of heart, benevolence, generosity of spirit, friendship, community and compassionate service in a way only volunteers can.

Volunteers do not take the place of paid employees, but rather add value to an organisation's programs and services. Volunteering is not about finding unpaid staff to perform the mundane tasks no-one else will do. Volunteer Programs are central to the values and purpose that drive an organisation to support others while also connecting with, and enabling, the community to contribute to the vision.

Many volunteers have worked in the sector for many years and are themselves increasing in age. Their impending retirement is making it necessary to consider whether the current opportunities available for volunteers will continue to attract other generations of volunteers, particularly the baby boomer generation.

The project leading to this report explored:

- The roles commonly filled by volunteers in the sector,
- Why current volunteers work in the aged and community care sector,
- The reasons why people choose not to volunteer in the sector, and
- What type of roles will attract volunteers in the future.

For the purpose of this revised report, the new definition adopted by Volunteering Australia in July 2015 is accepted, i.e.:

***Volunteering is time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain.***

Volunteering Australia does not recognise the Commonwealth's Work for the Dole and Mutual Obligation programs as 'volunteering', because it feels participants in these programs do not meet the definition of 'time willingly given, for the common good and without financial gain'. However, it *does* acknowledge that volunteer support services are often involved in managing the contribution of people's time and skills through these non-voluntary Government programs (Volunteering Australia 2017). This is true across many organisations in the aged and community care sector. In this project, no distinction was made, other than during consideration of *why* people were contributing.

## Background

The aged and community care sector could not provide the wide range of services currently available without the significant contribution made by volunteers. There are five and a half million baby boomers in Australia and they make up a significant proportion of the current volunteer workforce (Noone, J., 2012).

The eldest of the generation known as the baby boomers (born 1946 – 1965) has reached retirement age. Although the Australian Government has been actively encouraging later retirement among the nation's baby boomers, outcomes are as yet inconclusive. While almost one-half the cohort (48%) has indicated they intend to retire between 65 and 69 years, almost one-quarter (23%) intend to retire aged 70 or older (ABS 2016).

They are a very diverse group with different experiences and expectations to the previous generation (known as the builders). They are expected to be somewhat more affluent in their retirement, to enjoy good health for much longer than their parents and will transition to retirement in stages rather than move from fulltime work to no work the next day.

Will the baby boomers be attracted to volunteering and, if so, what type of roles will they choose to contribute their time? We do know that they will enjoy activities such as travel, social engagement and personal development. We also know that they will also be looking for ways in which they can contribute their skills in meaningful ways.

There are indicators that not only will they seek to make a positive difference in the lives of individuals, they will want to know that what they do makes a difference to their community, their nation or even the world.

This project explored the desires of baby boomers with a view to finding out if the traditional volunteer roles available will attract them and, if not, what changes need to be made to maximise their participation.

# Methodology

The Project Manager, from Aged & Community Services SA & NT, established a Steering Committee with representatives from Industry (ECH, Helping Hand and Minda), Volunteering SA & NT, COTA SA and Local Government (City of Onkaparinga). A Masters Social Work student on placement from Flinders University assisted the Project Manager by conducting a literature review, recording focus group discussions and interviews and collating the findings into a draft report.

As this was not a comprehensive research study, a literature review was conducted to outline the current understanding around volunteering across Australia and more specifically in South Australia.

The Steering Committee met regularly to guide the project. The Steering Committee members assisted with providing volunteers for the focus groups and members were also interviewed separately to provide insight into their considerable experiences managing volunteer programs.

Six volunteer focus groups were conducted with 41 participants.

## The 2017 Revision

The independent 2017 revision did not seek to interfere with the initial project findings. Rather, the purpose was to ensure report statistics represent contemporary research and that references available to readers for further information are the most recent available.

To this end, three additions were made to the Literature Review.

However, it is relevant to note that the updated statistics and literature do not contradict the findings of the original project, which remains relevant and specific to volunteering in the South Australian Aged and Community Care sector.



# Statistics

## *Volunteering in Australia*

5.8 million people engaged in voluntary work in Australia in 2014 (ABS Volunteering, 2015). According to the ABS 2014 General Social Survey, 31% of adults volunteer. Slightly more women (34%) volunteered than men (29%). These statistics are lower than in 2010 (6.1 million people, 36% of adults, 40% of women, 37% of men).

## *Age of Volunteers*

Volunteering rates were highest for people aged 15-17 years (42%), 35-44 years (39%) and 65-74 years (35%). This contrasts with 2010 data where the 45-54 age cohort had the highest level of volunteering. Couples with children (38%) were more likely to be involved in voluntary work (down from 55% in 2010) than lone persons (25%) or couples with no children (29%).

## *Employment Status*

People who were employed part time (38%) had higher levels of volunteering than those who were employed full time (30%) or unemployed (retired 27% and other 30%).

## *Relationship with income and education*

Volunteering increased with household income. People living in lower income households volunteered at a rate of 23% compared with 39% for higher income households. The volunteering rate was also lower for people who had not completed a non-school qualification (25%) compared with those who had completed up to an Advanced Diploma (32%) or Bachelor Degree (41%).

## *Volunteer History*

Once people start volunteering, they tend to keep doing it and their children quite often follow. Nearly half of volunteers had volunteered for more than 10 years. More than two-thirds of volunteers (70%) stated that their parents had volunteered.

## *Reasons for Volunteering*

The most common reason identified for being a volunteer was to help others or the community (64%), while more than half identified personal satisfaction (57%) or to do something worthwhile (54%). Personal or family involvement (45%), social contact (37%) and to be active (35%) were also reported as reasons for volunteering.

## *Most Common Tasks*

The most common volunteer tasks in 2014 were fundraising and sales (23%), teaching and providing information (15%), coaching or refereeing (14%) and preparing and serving food (14%). This differs from 2010 where fundraising tasks accounted for 48%, preparing and serving food 31% and administration support was also high at 26% (down to 12% in 2014).

### ***ABS Data for Volunteering in South Australia***

ABS data for volunteering by State or Territory (Sep 2015 ABS Social Survey Release) shows volunteering rates higher than nationally, with 33% of men and 40% of women contributing. Volunteering rates remained highest for people aged 15-17 years (49%) and 35-44 years (46%), but the 45-54 age cohort was also dominant (at 45%). Of those aged 65-74, 41% volunteered and 23% of those aged 75 and over also volunteered. These results could be influenced by the ABS's definition of volunteers as people who have given unpaid help (time, services and skills). People who have helped out their families and friends were not classified as volunteers in this project.

### ***Volunteering in SA 2016 Survey Data***

The information obtained through the Volunteering in Aged and Community Care Project is primarily based upon formal volunteering. The most recent statistics gathered specifically about formal volunteering in South Australia (Volunteering in South Australia, 2016) found 42% of South Australians engaged in formal volunteering in 2016, representing an all-time low since 2006. The 2014 (45%) level had halted a continuing gradual decrease from 2012 (45%), 2010 (47%), 2008 (49%) and 2006 (51%) – but in 2016 the downward trend returned.

The gender imbalance in formal volunteering increased in 2016, with 48% of females engaged, versus 36% of males. This is an all-time high gap (12%, versus 7% in 2014).

### ***Most Common Tasks in SA Volunteering Survey***

Volunteering in sport and recreation groups reclaimed the most common volunteering activity in South Australia in 2016 (having lost this position in 2014 to welfare and community groups). When *all* organisations are taken into account (not just the 'main' organisation) 36% of (South Australian) volunteers volunteered in this area. Other popular areas were welfare and community groups (25%), religious groups (13%), education and training (12%), and health (9%). Formal regional volunteering was higher (58%) than formal metropolitan volunteering (37%).

### ***Reasons for Volunteering in SA Volunteering Survey***

In 2016, the main reasons given for volunteering remained the same as 2014, although 'helping others or the community' at 32%, was significantly lower than the 40% in 2014 and 38% in 2012, and 'giving something back' at 15% decreased slightly after an increase to 19% in 2014. Notably, the proportion of respondents citing they volunteer for 'personal satisfaction' has decreased steadily over the last few surveys (from 19% in 2012 and 14% in 2014 to 7% in 2016). The key reasons cited by people for not volunteering were: 'No spare time (no reason given)' at 25% doubling from 13% in 2014; 'Health problems/physically unable (11% down from 15% in 2014); 'Too elderly' (10%, up from 7% in 2014) and 'Study commitments' (5%, down from 12% in 2014).

### *2017 Extent of volunteering in aged and community care in 2016*

For the first time in 2012, the Aged Care Workforce Census and Survey collected information about the number of volunteers and the hours they contributed in residential facilities and community care. This was repeated in 2016, with both the number of volunteers and overall hours contributed showing some increase.

In residential care, more than 23,500 volunteers contributed almost 115,000 hours of service in the designated fortnight, (at an average 4.9 hours per fortnight) at facilities that averaged 10 volunteers each. Volunteer roles included 'social activity support assistance' (82%); assisting in the 'planning of group activities' (68%) and to support 'companionship/befriending' (64%). A smaller share of facilities had volunteers undertaking roles of 'transport assistants' (23%), 'shopping/appointment assistants' (16%), and 'gardening assistants' (15%). Less than 10% of facilities had volunteers undertake 'domestic activity assistance' (9%); 'meal/preparation assistance' (6%); and 'other activities' (8%) with 'respite care assistance' (2%) and 'home maintenance assistance' (2%) rarely undertaken by volunteers.

In community care, almost 45,000 volunteers contributed more than 206,500 hours of service in the designated fortnight, (at an average 4.6 hours per fortnight) at outlets with an average 29 volunteers each.

As found in residential facilities, home care and home support outlets most often used volunteers for 'social activity support assistance' (55%), but this was much lower than for residential care. A high proportion of home support outlets had volunteer roles in 'planned group activity assistance' (50%) and 'companionship/befriending' (at 34%, almost half the 64% in residential facilities). Other roles were in 'transport assistance' (44%); 'Shopping/appointment assistance' (20%); and 'meal/preparation assistance' (30%). Volunteer roles for 'gardening assistance' were less commonly reported by home care and home support outlets (8% against 15% by residential facilities), while 12% of volunteers provided 'respite care assistance'. Fewer than 10% had volunteers undertake 'domestic activity assistance' (5%), and 'home maintenance assistance' (3%), with these last activities rarely undertaken by volunteers.

# Literature Review

## *2008 Volunteering in Local Government 'A way for the Future'*

Baby boomers are planning their retirement now. They are scaling back their working life and looking for activities that will engage them in their spare time. Skill based volunteering to support the work of community groups is seen as a global trend. Volunteers and the people responsible for managing them need to be engaged more effectively in decision making processes so they can understand and contribute to organisational shifts and changes.

Targeted marketing to baby boomers for specific tasks that interest them would increase the chances of them getting involved in the volunteer sector. Empowerment of youth, particularly those who are excluded or marginalised, is thought to be the most significant factor in encouraging youth volunteering. One of the main barriers to successful volunteer engagement and retention is the time and processes involved. People having decided they want to volunteer, want to start as soon as they can and they do not want to be burdened with onerous rules, regulations and paperwork along the way. The need for flexibility in the working arrangements for volunteers is also rated highly.

Corporate social responsibility plays an important role in whether baby boomers or generation X or Y will become involved in volunteering for an organisation. Money is not the motivating factor for generation Y, but the reputation of the organisation is.

## *2011 National Survey of Volunteering Issues*

The most common reason for Australians to volunteer is the sense of purpose it gives them and the difference it makes to the community. Volunteers indicated that the location, availability of volunteer work that matches their skills or interests, the values of the organisations and the knowledge that they are making a difference, are the most important factors that affect their desire to keep volunteering.

The top two circumstances which affect how or when a person volunteer are family commitments (59.3%) and work commitments (52.2%) with out of pocket expenses coming third (22.5%).

75% of the volunteers surveyed preferred regular volunteering at the same organisation. 40% indicated that they would like to volunteer for more than one organisation. Important factors for continuing to volunteer were knowing their contribution makes a difference (702) the values of the organisation (563), and volunteer work which matches interests and skills (516).

28.4% of volunteers have experienced or witnessed confusion or conflict between volunteers and paid employees. 31.2% perceived that improving respect and/or recognition of volunteers within the organisation and improving communication about the roles and contribution of paid and volunteer staff (28.5%) would reduce confusion or conflict.

20% of volunteers stated that they had experienced difficulties accessing and getting the training they needed to carry out their volunteer duties. They suggested that volunteering could be improved through better access to training, as well as greater flexibility in the expectations for volunteers and the ways in which volunteering can be undertaken.

This survey found that there is untapped potential within the field of corporate volunteering. The success of corporate volunteering is significantly affected by the development of strong long-term relationships between the companies and the volunteering agency. Corporate volunteers indicated that they liked to work with multiple not-for-profit organisations in short and long-term partnerships. The most important factors for companies contributing to the success of their employee volunteering program were that their partner organisation had shared goals, that there was mutual benefit, access to suitable volunteering opportunities and dedicated company resources.

### ***2013 Community Engagement, Volunteering and Retiring Baby Boomers***

Baby boomers are a group who are more diverse, healthier, more educated, more affluent, although not necessarily financially independent, who want to make a difference in ambitious ways. Most have been thinking about how they will spend their retirement for some time prior to doing it. Those interested in volunteering want to do so with greater flexibility and using skills they have obtained over their lifetime. Retirement for baby boomers means being able to travel, being involved in meaningful activities, personal development and maintaining health and fitness. They feared loss of independence, health issues and not having enough money to sustain a quality lifestyle.

Those who volunteered mostly enjoyed it. Any negative views were related to difficulties dealing with the bureaucracy that was involved in the experience. Volunteering was perceived as assisting with maintaining health through continued mental activity and social connection.

### ***Growing Older in the City of Holdfast Bay: Baby Boomers and Beyond***

Baby boomers are time poor and, unlike the generation before them, are not accepting of an inevitable decline in their health which will restrict their lifestyle. 60% do not intend working after they reach 65 years. They prefer (42.6%) to transition to retirement rather than stop work at once. During the transition, the extra spare time will provide baby boomers with an opportunity to explore new activities and interests.

Financial considerations formed the most common reason for continued employment beyond retirement age, followed by the benefits received through engagement, mental stimulation and making a meaningful contribution. Baby boomers expected to continue regular physical activity (87.5%), keep their mind active (74.5%) have a balanced diet (71.4%) and keep up with their social connections (64.6%) after retirement. A majority (63%) also intended to volunteer. The main reason for volunteering was reported to be to 'contribute something useful', followed by, 'to keep active', 'for enjoyment' and for 'a sense of wellbeing'.

### *2007 Volunteering as a Productive Aging Activity: Incentive and Barriers to Volunteering by Australian Seniors*

The profile of older Australian volunteers is quite narrow. It largely excludes people with fewer social and economic resources (Warburton et al. 2004). Financial costs, and organisations not using volunteer's skills effectively, were found to be significant barriers to people's continued volunteering. Another barrier identified was ageing and related issues (such as reduced confidence and decreased willingness to learn new skills). Non-volunteers rated barriers to volunteering differently to current volunteers. Non-volunteers believed that volunteering would be inflexible and felt that new volunteers would not be welcomed by existing volunteers and that volunteering would be 'boring'.

Incentives for volunteers were training, intergenerational opportunities, more flexible options and opportunities for unemployed older people. Focus group participants suggested that people need to know there is a need for volunteers and be asked to fill available roles. Word of mouth is the best recruitment method for seniors but organisations could benefit from pro-actively recruiting volunteers and using more publicity. People that were still working indicated that they were worried about a potential lack of support and ageism within the volunteer sector.

Baby boomers have different values to many of the existing older volunteers (who belong to the builders' generation). Baby boomers are concerned about the time commitment involved with volunteering, whereas the builder's generation volunteers are less concerned with this (or less vocal about it).

### *2006 Older People and Volunteering*

Older people who have a religious affiliation, larger social networks, are married, are in good health, from a higher socio-economic background (Onyx & Warburton, 2003) and who have a history of volunteering are more likely to volunteer (Warburton & Terry, 2000). Aboriginal Australians and Torres Strait Islanders think of their actions, which are informal volunteering, as volunteering and think of them as acts of community goodwill. Aboriginal Australians have a shorter life span and poorer health than other Australians. This may mean that their elders are not as involved with formal volunteering due to their higher exposure to health issues. A review of the English Home Office Older Volunteers Initiative found that people will, with encouragement, volunteer in areas where they would not traditionally (Rochester & Hitchinson, 2002). The Productivity Commission's project found that older volunteers will make up the majority of the volunteer workforce in the future. This might then create issues in areas in which elderly volunteers are not usually heavily involved in (such as emergency services) (Productivity Commission, 2005).

The older people who were most likely to volunteer were those that had the following perceptions about volunteering – they felt they had support for their volunteering from their close friends and family; they saw volunteering as easily accomplishable; they thought they should volunteer (they felt morally obliged); and they thought that many people around them were volunteering.

Baby boomers had a diverse range of reasons for volunteering. It was also found that there were a few things that would prevent them from commencing or continuing volunteering. They required an organisation to be professional and well organised, they wanted agencies to consult and value their volunteers and to be flexible for the volunteers. Employed baby boomers viewed corporate volunteering positively, as it would create time for them to volunteer without infringing on their family time or compromise their careers (Esmond, 2001).

There are a number of barriers to volunteering. Some of the key barriers identified are:

#### Perceptions and attitudes barriers

1. Problems associated with ageing, such as reduced confidence and decreased willingness to learn new skills.
2. Some older people having limited understanding or misguided views about what volunteering involves and what types of volunteering is available

#### Other Barriers

3. Non-volunteers rated barriers to volunteering differently to volunteers. They indicated that volunteering is inflexible (time wise) and that new volunteers were not made to feel welcome by existing volunteers.
4. Financial costs and organisations not using volunteers' experience and skills effectively.

### **2016 The State of Volunteering in Australia**

This 2016 report prepared by PricewaterhouseCoopers Australia (PwC) for Volunteering Australia found a disconnect between the volunteering roles in which people are interested and those organisations are offering. Many volunteer involving organisations involve volunteers as manpower, rather than developing volunteer roles to suit individual skills and experience. Many volunteers felt undervalued and that their roles were not designed strategically to accommodate their skills and interests, especially relative to paid staff. Solutions include changing human resource management strategies and using the *National Standards for Volunteer Involvement* resources and tools.

There is also misalignment between the sectors in which volunteers are interested and the sectors with the most vacancies. Sectors such as Animal Welfare and Arts and Culture are oversubscribed, while Disability Services, Young People and Health have high volunteer vacancies. To improve the balance, targeted marketing (in collaboration with volunteering peak bodies) is recommended.

Volunteers are deterred from volunteering because of lack of flexibility, personal expenses incurred, lack of reimbursement for out of pocket expenses, and burdensome administrative requirements. While 60% of volunteers incurred out of pocket expenses through their role, only 18% requested reimbursement and, of these, 49% were fully reimbursed, 44% partially and 7% not at all. A reduction in administration red-tape would help, but exploring avenues for virtual volunteering (such as online volunteering tasks) is recommended – to accommodate flexibility needs, as well as to leverage services already paid for by volunteers (such as internet and phone).

A lack of human and financial resources inhibits organisations' capacity to engage volunteers with barriers (e.g. people with a disability, people with language barriers); and to adequately recognise their existing volunteer base. Advocacy around the economic impacts of volunteering could help attract additional resourcing.

Volunteer involving organisations need to ensure a timely response to enquiries and explore options for online methods of recruitment and volunteering. Adapting to technological change is vital to futureproofing volunteering. Online volunteering tasks could include managing social media, promoting causes through social media, or providing chat room support.

### **2016 Information Sheet: The impact of volunteering on happiness and health**

This document (produced by Volunteering Victoria in August 2016) provides an overview of research and analysis about the benefits of volunteering; has assembled a literature review; and provides a comprehensive list of references for further research.

The document cites research that claims positive impacts for volunteering on happiness and mental health (through being a source of joy, improving emotional health, reducing the psychological impact of low socioeconomic status, aiding social integration, and developing skills and experience etc) and also on physical health and longevity (through feeling healthier, reducing blood pressure, reducing pain, etc).

The compiled research suggests people who could benefit from volunteering include older people, and people with mental illness, chronic pain or recovering from heart attacks.

However, a 'volunteering threshold' is noted. Little positive health benefits were found in those volunteering less than 100 hours a year (two hours a week) and this was also suggested as the point past which no *additional* positive benefits can be gained.

Implications for volunteer management are discussed, including the need to recognise the complexity of the evidence; prevent 'burn-out' through over-commitment; monitor and manager older volunteers and those with mental illness; and ensure there is no coercion to fill volunteering needs, but rather recruitment through the design of programs that attract volunteers and feed into their motivation.

### **2016 Here are ten ways to lose volunteers!**

From a volunteer manager of 19 years (in 2016 Development and Engagement Specialist at Australian Red Cross) D. J. Cronin's blog about ten ways to lose volunteers is succinct:

1. The interview is too formal and serious,
2. Your orientation program is cold,
3. Nobody is too sure what the volunteer should be doing when they commence,
4. Volunteers see other volunteers doing nothing or simply not being very nice to each other and no one says anything because 'they are volunteers',
5. A volunteer finishes a few shifts and wonders if they are making a difference at all,



6. Change without consultation,
7. No ongoing training opportunities,
8. Nobody says thanks,
9. Lack of communication, and
10. Lack of flexibility.

Volunteers should leave every shift enabled, empowered and inspired. Volunteers may not say it, but they expect good leadership. Also, while they will say they do not do their work for thanks, they need acknowledgment – and not just in Volunteer Week. Do it and do it often.

Effective Volunteer Management ensures it is a safe and enjoyable volunteering space for everyone and knows how to manage the difficult conversations. Flexibility is important because circumstances for volunteers can change rapidly. Can you help the person who used to volunteer one day a week to one day a month if this is what they want? Can you take back that volunteer who wants to leave for six months to travel or study?

## Types of Volunteer Roles in Aged and Community Care

Traditional roles volunteers fill within the sector are wide and various. They include, but are not limited to:

- Assisting with social programs,
- Cooking and/or delivering/serving meals,
- Providing transport – car, bus or helping to access public transport,
- Administration,
- Gardening,
- General clean ups,
- Accompanying people to appointments,
- Respite or friendly visiting,
- Peer support/education,
- Fundraising,
- Event organisation and implementation,
- Entertainment,
- Art and craft,
- Running cafés, canteens, craft shops,
- Mentoring, teaching, sharing skills,
- Handyman jobs, toy making, repairing equipment,
- Errands and odd jobs, and/or
- Boards and Advisory Committees.

# Interviews with Managers/ Volunteer Coordinators

Seven co-ordinators from different organisations were interviewed individually. The interviewees came from - industry, peak body and local government.

## *Good Management Essential*

Good management of volunteer programs is important for the attraction and retention of volunteers. Roles and positions that are directly responsible for managing volunteers (such as volunteer co-ordinators and managers) are becoming increasingly recognised as necessary. It seems to be acknowledged that these positions need to be adequately resourced in order to ensure that volunteers remain satisfied within their roles, engaged in tasks which suit and interest them and feel appreciated by the organisations they devote their time to. Baby boomer volunteers are more likely than the builders to leave if they are unhappy with aspects of their involvement and they are well equipped to seek alternative volunteering roles. There are more opportunities for volunteers than in decades past.

Volunteer managers are responsible for the HR management of sometimes hundreds of volunteers, including developing volunteer roles and opportunities, recruitment, job and person specifications, matching to roles that suit the person's skills and interests, induction, review, liaison with paid staff, work health safety, insurance, re-imburement, managing budgets, performance management, quality standards, conflict resolution, event management, reward and recognition etc. The complexity of their work is frequently under-valued, but without this coordination, volunteer programs will not be sustainable, especially with the increasing expectations of baby boomers around the organisations professionalism and reputation.

## *Recruitment*

The builders and baby boomers make up the majority of the current volunteer workforce. Over 55 years clients from Centrelink, people from culturally and linguistically diverse countries, generation X and Y and students seeking work experience to improve their employment chances also work as volunteers within the sector. Volunteers from the builders and baby boomer generations demonstrate a preference for working in long-term positions for one or two agencies.

Most of the current volunteers are women, but the number of male volunteers is increasing. There are certain roles (such as drivers) that are mainly carried out by male volunteers. In the past, the volunteer workforce was primarily made up of women, but there is an opportunity to grow male participation with the right positions.

The industry representatives interviewed for this project reported that they recruited volunteers through a variety of ways including through volunteer agencies (such as Volunteering SA & NT), word-of-mouth, friend and family recruitment and through people's familiarity and exposure to organisations (which they then approach when they decide to volunteer). None of the organisations had experienced difficulty finding volunteers, but were concerned that this may not be the case in the future as existing volunteers retired. Excess volunteers were referred to other organisations.

### *Adequately Resourced*

Funding is an issue for many organisations. Funding shortages can limit the training available to volunteers, the roles and tasks available for the volunteers and the personnel employed to manage volunteers. This can lead to volunteers having to wait too long to be matched to a volunteer role, doing roles and duties that do not specifically suit their skills and interests, not being trained as extensively as they could be, or not having clarity in their roles, their place in the organisation or around appropriate reporting pathways.

### *Corporate Commitment and Embeddedness*

Volunteering needs to be embedded in corporate policy, values and mission. Executive managers need to identify the context and rationale for volunteering within their organisation and identify their place in the corporate structure. Paid staff need to be informed about the purpose and place of volunteers during induction and be informed about their responsibility around respecting and supporting them as colleagues.

It is necessary to have a clear distinction between volunteers and paid workers and this distinction needs to be communicated and understood by all stakeholders. There are some roles and tasks that volunteers should not be expected to do, such as personal care, financial management, or medical intervention. Volunteers also need to know their responsibilities regarding health and safety, role scope, who is responsible for supervising and supporting them and who to contact in an emergency or if they have a complaint.

### *Matching Skills and Interests*

There are not always roles within organisations that suit individual volunteers. This can result in them leaving to find more suitable roles within different organisations. Volunteers are typically matched to roles that might suit their skills, life experience and interests. However, not all volunteers can be placed in their ideal volunteer job because organisations also need to fill volunteer roles that may be less popular than others. It was recognised that there is a need for volunteer programs that add value to client's lives as opposed to simply filling specific needs of volunteers.

The industry representatives interviewed for this project have increasingly diversified their volunteer workforce and see this as enhancing the overall benefit. They work in partnership with companies (corporate volunteering), schools (high school compulsory volunteering) and other groups (disability groups). Their organisations have realised that there are different ways to engage volunteers and are taking advantage of these opportunities.

The primary reasons volunteers cite for leaving are increasing age, health issues, increased commitment to other volunteer roles and changes in family circumstances.

### *Corporate Volunteering*

Corporate volunteering is gaining recognition as an area where opportunities for volunteer growth in the future exist. Corporate volunteering can be time-consuming to organise and maintain but it provides a wealth of benefits and positive results. Many of the organisations involved in the consultation process of this report were not currently involved in ongoing, regular corporate volunteering but indicated that it is an area which they want to look into in the future.

# Volunteer Focus Groups

Six focus groups were conducted across different organisations. Forty-one volunteers participated in the focus groups. Tasks occupying the focus group volunteers were social groups, meal preparation, delivery and coordination, disability social/activity group, peer education, mentoring, community advocacy, administration, volunteer rosters etc.

## *Length of Time Volunteering*

41% of volunteers were aged over fifty-five when they started volunteering. Of the 33 who indicated their current age, 64% were aged between 66 and 75. 17 (41%) began volunteering before they reached the age of 40 and particularly between the ages of 26 and 40 when they had children at school. The majority volunteered between 3 to 4 hours each time they volunteered and devoted their time on a weekly basis for one (17) or more (17) organisations.

## *Reason for Volunteering*

58% chose to volunteer because they wanted to help others. They wanted to give something back to the community. Other reasons for contributing their time were, their previous connection to the organisation (21%), for personal satisfaction eg social connection, being able to use their skills or knowledge (19%). One person identified their reason for volunteering as a compulsory Centrelink requirement.

## *Pathway to Volunteering*

18 of the focus group participants found their current volunteer position through word of mouth ie through colleagues, friends and family. 12 approached organisations directly while 6 responded to advertisements in the print media or online. Four were approached by the organisation and one via a volunteer agency.

The clear majority of volunteers described their ideal volunteer job as doing what they are currently doing once or twice a week. This demonstrated that people were finding the pathway to the volunteer roles that suited their skills and interests. Having found their ideal volunteer role, most were keen to continue for as long as they were able to physically. There were a number of tasks they would not want to do as a volunteer. Personal care was the most common response, followed closely by heavy physical work.

## *Satisfaction from Volunteering*

The three main reasons participants liked volunteering, and in fact the reasons which kept them volunteering, were for the social connection, the satisfaction of helping others and because of the positive feelings it generated such as happiness, being appreciated and increasing skills and knowledge. Most were aware of the health benefits of keeping mind and body active in later life and saw volunteering as a way to keep up mental challenges, physical activity, social connection and meaningful occupation.

### *Reasons to Leave*

Most volunteers agreed that they would not work for an organisation that did not share their values or which was of dubious standing in the community. They would also leave if they felt their efforts were not achieving a positive difference to others or if their efforts were not appreciated or valued or if they felt the bureaucracy outweighed the benefit.

### *Considerations for Retention*

Flexibility was mentioned at every focus group. Volunteers wanted to know that they would not be letting anyone down if they wanted to take some time off to travel or if they were ill. Most felt they had the flexibility in their existing roles eg they volunteered as a team so one would not be missed (community meals or crafts), they had others who could step into their role if they were not available (ie friendly visiting), they chose non client roles (administration) or they could arrange their schedule around their volunteering (peer educators).

The most satisfied volunteers were those who felt they had the support from the organisation through a key person they could contact if they had any questions or concerns, who made their roles clear and who appreciated them and kept them informed of their progress, ie acknowledged the work they did and how it made a positive difference. To know the difference their work made in someone's life was the best acknowledgement.

Some mentioned that it was important that the organisation covered them with the relevant insurance and reimbursed them for out of pocket expenses because transport costs alone could add up.

### *Those Who Don't Volunteer*

When asked about the reasons their friends, family or acquaintances don't volunteer it was thought they were too busy with other matters such as family, other interests, travel etc. Other main reasons were that they had misconceptions about working in the sector, believing it would be either too difficult, not a match for their skills or not interesting enough. Some friends had expressed that they did not want to work in an industry that reminds them they will one day have declining health.

### *Marketing Suggestions*

Most believed that volunteering in aged and community care needed to be promoted to create a positive image, to inform people about the scope of the work and to dispel current myths about working in the sector. There is a need for better awareness about volunteering, different volunteer roles and what they entail. Certain volunteer roles are less popular than others because of negative perceptions and connotations associated with them.

# Bringing it all together

## *Invaluable Contribution*

There used to be a strong perception that people who volunteered were lonely people who volunteered to find friends or fill their time. It is closer to the truth that, 'if you want something done, ask a busy person'. Many of the volunteers who participated in this project were very busy people who volunteered for more than one organisation or who had plenty of other commitments apart from their volunteer activities.

The not for profit aged and community care sector relies on the profoundly positive contribution volunteers make to the people they support and services they deliver. Many existing volunteers are from the builder generation and they have devoted their lives in service to others, happy in the knowledge that they are helping those in need.

## *Harnessing the Skills and Talents of Baby Boomers*

The baby boomers, born between 1946 and 1965, are large in numbers, planning to transition to retirement and plan to enjoy their increasing leisure time through enjoyable, physical, social and mental pursuits.

Volunteering has the potential to meet the diverse and different needs of baby boomers. Baby boomers have the values, skills and attributes to continue, and grow, the considerable benefit volunteers make within the industry. Although not a homogenous group, there are some emerging trends which will need to be considered and accommodated to maximise the attraction and retention of baby boomers.

## Why Current Volunteers Work in the Aged and Community Care Sector

### *Connection with Organisation or Need*

Research indicates that people who volunteer often have a family history of volunteering and many commence volunteering while their children are at school. Quite often, they volunteer for organisations they have a connection with eg had a child with a disability who attends a social group or a parent in an aged care facility which they visit. Baby boomers also search online for a volunteer role which interests them, are approached by a friend already volunteering or by staff from the organisation directly. They also respond to vacancies advertised through print or other media.



### *Professional Organisations with Similar Values*

The volunteer positions chosen are in organisations which fill some need in the community, and particularly for baby boomers, match their values, skills and interests. Baby boomers expect that as volunteers they will be provided with clarity around their roles, the resources they need to do their work and professional guidance and/or training as required. They also expect to be listened to and to be included in decisions about their role and, if necessary, some will be willing and able to design and coordinate volunteer programs that they see meet a need on behalf of the organisation.

Newer volunteers want to know that the organisation is well managed, and prefer to deal with a staff member with dedicated responsibility for volunteers if they have questions or concerns about their role. They want to know that the work they and other volunteers do is appreciated by the organisation and that they are accepted and treated respectfully by paid staff and senior executives. They understand the increasing complexity that surrounds any human service but they do not want to be bothered with the bureaucracy that goes with it. Those who have come from paid employment, particularly, express that paperwork and restrictive regulations/procedures is the one thing they wanted to get away from. Baby boomer volunteers will be very happy to be involved in any decision about their work and will expect to be included in any discussion about improving or changing their roles or the direction of volunteering in the organisation.

### *Maintains Physical and Mental Health*

Baby boomers expect to live very full and active lives after retirement and they believe that their continued good health can be maximised by keeping physically active, mentally stimulated, socially engaged and to do this through meaningful pursuits is a particularly attractive proposition. The 'use it or lose it' message has had a profound effect on this generation and organisations will benefit if they take advantage of the opportunities this creates.

### *Matches Skills and Talents*

There appears to be a trend in the baby boomer generation wanting roles which specifically use their considerable skills such as in administration; peer education; maintaining and making equipment, toys and aids; mentoring; community advocacy etc. More female baby boomers, than in the builder generation, have had a lifetime of paid employment so are more confident in asking for positions which suit their skills and interests, whereas the builders were more inclined to just ask what needs to be done. The number of men volunteering within the sector is another growing trend.

### *The Positive Difference is Apparent and Acknowledged*

The recognition volunteers find most meaningful is being acknowledged for the difference their effort is making in the lives of others. This is the reason they volunteer after all. It is still important, however, that responsible staff provide regular feedback about their work and build a rapport which demonstrates they are valued and an important part of the team.

## Why People Don't Volunteer in Aged and Community Care

Current volunteers were asked what reasons their friends, acquaintances and family members had expressed about why they don't volunteer. These were the main reasons identified:

- Too busy – work, family commitments,
- Want to pursue travel and other pastimes (and they have the finances to do so),
- Poor health or poor health of someone they are caring for,
- They don't want to be working in an environment which confronts them, eg about what they can expect in old age or helping frail or disabled people with personal tasks like toileting or trying to communicate with people who have lost the capacity to do so,
- Not aware of volunteering, its scope and practice,
- Think aged and community care doesn't match their skill set and may be boring, or
- Volunteering doesn't form part of their value system.

Volunteer participants felt there was a level of fear and mystery surrounding volunteering within the sector which made it less likely for those that have had no previous connection with frail older people (especially those living with dementia) or people with disability, to volunteer. Bad publicity about residential facilities and what went on in them, bad smells, long wards, cries for help etc were certainly not helping to dispel those myths.

There is a perception that, although working in aged and community care is a worthy vocation, it is about caring for the declining rather than making a positive difference. The new policy directions of wellness, reablement, consumer directed care, healthy ageing etc will be much more attractive to future volunteers and should be promoted strongly within the community.

Word of mouth from existing volunteers is certainly working, as many were currently involved because of their connections with others, but volunteers overwhelmingly believed more should be done to promote the positive side of working in the sector. The promotion would not only make people aware of the wonderful services the sector provides, but would surprise them with the wide range of volunteer roles they can participate in.

## What Type of Roles Will Attract Volunteers into the Future?

There is a perception that baby boomers will be attracted to intermittent or short periodic type of roles (such as project work, one off events, clean ups etc). Being a diverse group there will be many who are, but there was no indication of this during the discussions with the volunteers who participated in this project.

Baby boomer volunteers still report that they want to work once or twice a week for one or two organisations as long as some flexibility could be accommodated – flexibility in the sense that, if the volunteer needs to take some time off for travel, family commitments or health reasons, the work they are involved with can carry on. It was very important to them that they would not be letting someone down if they needed time away from their role.

Most of the evidence and feedback collated for this report found that many baby boomers will be happy to continue in traditional roles as long as:

- They see the benefit to others,
- There is flexibility built in so that the work can continue if they have time away, and
- They feel they have the skills to confidently do the task.

There were also indications that this was starting to change as new opportunities become available to choose from and the boundaries of volunteer activities continued to be pushed.

## Future Proof Your Volunteer Programs

### *Makes a Difference*

- Ensure the benefit of the organisation and the volunteer's role is central to all promotion.
- Provide opportunities for volunteers to hear about the difference they make from the person/people they assist eg provide feedback from client satisfaction surveys, tours of whatever their fundraising efforts went towards, collect quotes from clients who have had support from the volunteer personally.
- Let volunteers know what happens to the people they support once the person doesn't have it anymore.
- Develop job descriptions which outline how the volunteer role fits into the larger purpose of the organisation, its purpose and values and how the volunteer position contributes to a beneficial outcome.
- When you send volunteers a Christmas card or birthday card, get it signed by the CEO or relevant Manager as well as the person they support.
- Emphasise the benefit volunteers can make to older people and people with disabilities through the organisations practices of maximising independence through healthy ageing, reablement, wellness and consumer directed care.
- Include volunteers in any discussions about changes to their roles, or changes to the volunteer programs.

### *Values and Professional Standing of the Organisation*

- Ensure volunteer programs are embedded into the strategic plans and the organisational structure and that volunteers are treated with respect by paid staff at every level.
- Promote your organisation by 1) the positive difference it makes and 2) the corporate values it emulates and 3) the professional standards it meets, including the national volunteer standards.
- Show any community/client/stakeholder feedback collected demonstrating 1) that the organisation values feedback and 2) the high level of satisfaction and therefore the standing of that organisation within its community of practice.
- Ensure staff and volunteers are recognised by the organisation for their contribution towards this high standing in the community and with people they support. This recognition will assist with recruitment if placed in a prominent position on the website.
- To demonstrate that the organisation recognises and values the part volunteers play in the organisation's success, put the resources into employing a volunteer manager to promote volunteering within the community and to promptly respond to applications and match volunteers to positions. People will move to other organisations if they have to wait too long to be engaged. It will result in the perception that the organisation does not value the role of volunteers and that their staff and processes are inept. (Baby boomers bring with them a lifetime of experience, often employed in executive positions in the past.)
- Provide clear job descriptions, reporting pathways and suitable induction.
- Ensure volunteers have all the necessary protections needed to work safely and they are aware of, but not overburdened by, the machinery of governance required to meet legislative and corporate requirements.
- Consider a corporate volunteering program as it demonstrates the organisation's commitment to volunteering, helps overcome any staff vs volunteer antagonism and introduces staff to the concept of contribution to a cause.

### *Matching Skills and Interests*

- To retain volunteers it is essential to employ a skilled person to accurately identify the reason the volunteer applicant wants to volunteer, the skills they have to offer and their personal interests. Sometimes people will know what they want to do and why, but often they won't. These have to be skilfully drawn out through discussion, because if the match is not a good one, they will leave.

- Interviewers need to have a genuine interest in people, their lives and their drivers to be able to build the necessary rapport to not only match volunteers to the roles they will find satisfying, but also to support them and resolve any issues that occur along the way. Volunteer management is more complex than managing staff because they are not contracted to the organisation and not subject to performance reviews or other disciplinary processes. If a volunteer causes conflict within a team of volunteers, it has to be managed with the utmost skill, discretion and sensitivity.
- Volunteer Managers will need to be resourceful enough to not only match volunteers to current roles they have available but to negotiate (with executive managers) new roles and opportunities for volunteers. Do not overlook or disregard the wealth of skills, knowledge and experience each volunteer has to offer. If volunteers want to take an active leadership role, find ways they can do so and if that means expanding the existing suite of volunteer duties, involve them in the design and development of new programs, supports and services.
- If skills and interests are matched, the positive health benefits will be an inevitable outcome which can be promoted in the recruitment materials.
- Find ways to accommodate the flexibility so important to the new generations of volunteers – job sharing roles, scheduled work around the volunteer’s other commitments, team volunteering etc.

### *Social Connection*

- Recognise that the relationships volunteers form with staff, the people they support and with other volunteers is extremely important and will make or break the experience for them. It will require your coaching, counselling and listening skills from time to time.
- Provide regular feedback, supportive rapport and appreciation – and monitor the treatment volunteers experience from other staff they are in contact with to ensure it is respectful and kind.
- Provide opportunities for volunteers to enjoy social connection with other volunteers.

## Opportunities for Expanding the Volunteer Workforce

### *Volunteer Diversity*

Volunteers are primarily from educated, employed, middle class backgrounds. There is an opportunity to engage with more marginalised groups eg people with disabilities, marginalised youth, unemployed, culturally diverse groups (who are often involved with informal volunteering). Aged and community care organisations can forge partnerships with community organisations representing these groups with a view to developing volunteer programs for mutual benefit.

### ***Volunteering as a Career Pathway***

Promoting volunteering as a pathway to employment has its benefits and challenges. Organisations have found it extremely successful where catering, hospitality, food handling is concerned but somewhat disruptive where a ticket or licence is achieved eg community bus driving. Disruption can be reduced, however, with volunteer agreements around expected length of service.

### ***Promotion to those Transitioning to Retirement***

Mature workers moving towards retirement commonly consider volunteering as an activity to take up in the future. Start promoting opportunities in your organisation to part time workers and those nearing retirement as well as to past employees. Current employees can also promote volunteering opportunities to their friends and other members of their family. It also provides a way to manage knowledge transfer within an ageing workforce.

### ***Centrelink Recipients Aged Over 55***

People who leave work prior to retirement age can agree to do a set number of hours per fortnight of recognised volunteer activity in order to receive the New Start Allowance. While volunteering may not have been a consideration before, the right position can transform an indifferent participant into a dedicated volunteer contributor. Men in particular are keen to be involved, so consider roles which may use their particular skills or talents.

### ***Broaden Opportunities for Connection with Community***

People who already have a connection to your organisation are more likely to volunteer than those who have no prior experience with aged and community care. Promote volunteering opportunities to relatives, friends and associates of the people you support.

### ***Younger Volunteers***

Form partnerships with schools, other educational institutions, community and sporting groups, service clubs, churches etc. Provide intergenerational programs or one off events that bring all ages into contact with your organisation and the people it serves. Develop the connections which will lead not only to future volunteering, but also potential future staff.

### ***Promotion***

Keep good news stories in the local media, eg:

- Facility open days,
- School visiting, performance, reading,
- Celebratory events such as Easter egg hunt,
- Have local sports club or service club host an outing or a BBQ for residents, or
- Have local students film people's stories for the library.

### *Corporate Volunteering*

Having a program of corporate volunteering in your workplace establishes an ethos of volunteer contribution. It also introduces people who otherwise may not have thought about volunteering to the personal satisfaction it provides. Once the experience is provided, participants may choose to incorporate voluntary work into their lifestyle.

## Recommendations

- Volunteering peak bodies promote innovation and best practice in volunteer programs on their website or in publication/newsletters.
- Promote awareness of volunteering on industry peak bodies' websites.
- Further research be conducted with people who do not volunteer to find out reasons and possible solutions.
- Funders and organisations to work together to ensure programs are adequately resourced to ensure their future sustainability.



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