

Volunteering Visions is both an inspiration and a handbook.

It contains 29 interviews with Australian community leaders, policy makers, and administrators who have strong views on volunteering.

The interviews are a reminder of the necessity and rewards of active citizenship, and a valuable resource for those working to achieve community goals.

The interviewees include Patrick McClure of Mission Australia, Sandy Hollway of Sydney Olympic fame, Margaret Reeson, Moderator of the Uniting Church of NSW, Ian Kiernan of Clean Up Australia and Sha Cordingley of Volunteering Australia.

They discuss the challenges of volunteering and not-for-profit organisations—responding to and initiating change, inclusiveness, funding, legal and safety issues, establishing partnerships and coalitions, and the need for strong leadership. They forecast the future of volunteering.

These interviews make it clear that volunteering is gutsy, not necessarily nice. Volunteers challenge inequity, adversity and lethargy, boldly working towards a more resilient, engaged and cohesive Australia.

Readers are challenged to build community and provide opportunities for people of all ages and backgrounds to be part of the action.

...It is a pleasure to read a collection of contributions that highlights the diversity and importance of volunteering and provides challenging ideas for the future.

Sandy McCutcheon, Writer and Radio National Broadcaster

Australia spins on volunteers! Volunteering is in a state of massive change—but can it survive with values intact? This book addresses this challenge head-on.

Michael Raper, President, Australian Council of Social Service

Just when you thought you could take volunteering for granted! *Volunteering Visions* sounds a warning. All readers with a genuine interest in advancing the health of our society should read this book.

Mary Porter, President, Volunteering Australia

VOLUNTEERING VISIONS

Editors: Joy Noble & Fiona Johnston

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INTRODUCTION

The successful involvement of volunteers in the Sydney Olympic Games was a wake-up call for many in the wider community. The diversity of voluntary activity and its influence on almost every aspect of our communal lives is finally being recognised. The International Year of Volunteers has followed through on this interest by encouraging policy makers, administrators, community leaders and volunteers to maintain volunteering as a vibrant and essential ingredient in Australian life.

However many questions need to be asked about the nature of the volunteering scene in Australia. How and in what ways is it changing? Who is involved? What affect do societal changes have? How can we maintain the integrity of volunteering as something which people choose to do – without coercion? This book addresses these questions and many more.

That the huge contribution of volunteering to Australian society has been largely ignored until recently may be due to the fact that activities range across so many areas of interest. Perhaps it is because volunteers do not look for recognition. Perhaps it is because volunteering has been so much a part of Australian life that it has not been seen as needing comment. Or perhaps, as one contributor to this book says, volunteering has been depicted as being “too soft and too nice – not enough guts”. This book shows how gutsy volunteering is.

The volunteer scene continues to change as the lifestyles of many Australians change and the nature of volunteer involvement develops in different and exciting ways. New issues are being discussed and necessary safeguards put in place. In addition to national and state peak bodies, more and more regional volunteer resource centres are being established with the aim of promoting and supporting volunteering.

National and State surveys and research are being conducted by statisticians and academics. Training courses in the management of volunteer programs are offered across all States. The *Australian Journal on Volunteering* enjoys a wide readership. State and national conferences and gatherings have facilitated information sharing, policy development and problem solving. Despite gloomy predictions by some, the latest survey conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics in 2000 (published in 2001) shows a significant increase in the number of people volunteering.

Further changes are on the way. Governments and sections of the corporate world are now actively interested in volunteering. Organisations are reassessing their attitudes and practices as fresh

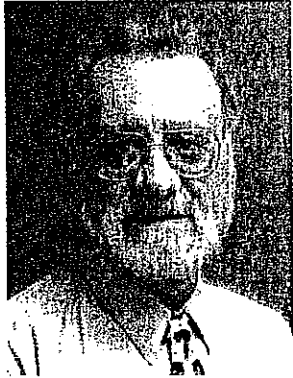
insights, issues and opportunities emerge in line with our changing environment. In the recently published book, *Australian Volunteers at Work: 101 Stories*, volunteers tell their inspiring stories. A second recent book, *Volunteers and Volunteering*, is a stimulating collection of papers by academics exploring research, writing and ideas about volunteering in Australia. But what of the views of policy-makers, administrators and community leaders? This book, *Volunteering Visions*, is an edited collection of interviews which records the insights and visions of people who are pace-setters within many areas where volunteers are involved. Some are involved in community organisations, while others come from a government or corporate perspective.

The result is a presentation of volunteering as going beyond the provision of services and advocacy in a participatory democracy. Volunteering is seen as a launching pad for creative thinking, innovation and community building.

The possibilities are enormous. We are challenged to keep abreast of our changing world, think laterally and take the lead in stimulating, motivating and providing creative opportunities for all Australians to join the action.

A Trade Union Perspective

Peter Christopher



Peter Christopher is Chief Industrial Officer of the Public Service Association of South Australia. Prior to that he was the South Australian Branch Secretary of the Public Sector Union. Peter has been a senior full time union official for over 20 years. His volunteer efforts in the field of maritime archaeology were recognised through a Commonwealth Government award. Peter is a Justice of the Peace.

The principal role of trade unions is to look after the industrial interests of their members. But unions also recognise that members belong to their communities and occupy additional roles, for example, a member of a trade union may also be a voluntary member of a local group such as a school council. So in addressing the industrial needs of members, we are conscious of their differing needs and expectations.

Communities too have a range of different needs, depending on whether you are talking about a capital city, a regional centre, or an isolated location. Then there are communities made up of people with special needs, such as an Indigenous group, a school community, a hospital, a nursing home.

I have been involved as a volunteer in a maritime archaeology organisation researching shipwrecks throughout South Australia. This group has undertaken a significant amount of work to the point where the State Government has employed full-time, paid maritime archaeologists. The volunteer group works well in conjunction with the paid personnel, and clearly the volunteer group has the capacity to conduct a significant amount of work which no government could ever hope to achieve. The paid maritime archaeologists complement the role of the volunteers and perform a valuable co-ordination role that would not otherwise be possible.

Trade union policy on volunteering

When one looks at the issue of volunteering from a union perspective, the principal concern is to ensure that the paid workforce is not undermined by employers or governments trying to get work done "on the cheap" by bringing in volunteers. There is a role for a paid workforce and there is a role for volunteers, and those roles are complementary in many cases. Difficulties arise when, rather than involving volunteers in work which is appropriate for them, governments or other employers choose to use volunteers as a means of avoiding the payment of wages.

The policy on volunteering of the Public Service Association of South Australia (PSA) is contained in its *Workplace Representative's Handbook* (PSA, 2000). This specifies that the union will not support the introduction of any new voluntary service unless a number of pre-conditions are met. These include full consultation between all parties followed by a negotiated agreement which clearly sets out the nature and extent of the voluntary activity, demarcation arrangements, procedures, why voluntary labour is necessary, and a range of administrative and review procedures.

As an example, there is a formal agreement between the PSA and the Department of Environment and Heritage, which is responsible for national parks. A significant amount of volunteer work occurs in national parks and the existing agreement provides for formal notification by the Department before further volunteers are brought in. The system works well, and enables the sorting out of any issues before problems arise, while protecting the community and the paid workforce by having proper procedures in place. While there have been several cases of work being carried out by volunteers as a form of cheap labour, in the main this is rare. The agreement we have in place realistically addresses the needs of volunteers and protects the paid workforce.

Appropriate and inappropriate involvement of volunteers

Many volunteers work in the health system, for example, staffing kiosks and food distribution centres in order to raise funds to assist the hospital. This is recognised as legitimate support. However, volunteers may be asked to perform other types of work, for example, clerical work, which raises significant issues about duty of care, formal responsibility and liability, and concerns about the confidentiality of public records. If one looks at areas such as hospitals, schools and prisons, the potential for

confidential information to be accessed is significant. We have also experienced difficulties where, for example, the prison system had insufficient staff to accompany prisoners undertaking study and used volunteers who were at the prison for totally different reasons. This is quite inappropriate.

We live in a society where governments are continually trying to save money – the temptation is for work to be performed on an unpaid basis. In some cases this may be through paid members of the workforce being expected to do a significant amount of work in their own time without payment, but in many cases involves reliance on volunteers.

In looking at the situation in schools, we can readily accept that all parents want the best for their children, and will assist schools to the maximum extent to ensure that they receive the best possible education. When one looks at sporting activities there is a tremendous role that volunteers, generally parents, play. Where problems arise is when that same group of parents is asked to assist in the education process, often at the expense of teachers or school services officers who perform support functions. One needs to question, for example, when parents are being asked to come into classrooms to assist with reading or other exercises. This can impact on the education of children by reducing the number of qualified people in the classroom. It is a delicate situation, knowing that there can be a role for both. However, there need to be clear guidelines as to what procedures are required in order to protect the volunteers from any legal liability they might face, ensure that the children receive the best possible education from trained, skilled Education Department staff, and to cope with the pressure of limited budgets.

The community recognises the important and valuable role that groups like the Country Fire Service play and the fact that there is insufficient funding, and perhaps insufficient personnel, to have a paid workforce of firefighters in every location. Once again a balance is necessary between what the paid workforce does and what the volunteers do in that situation. This system works particularly well in the firefighting and other emergency services because they are disciplined organisations which have clear guidelines defining the role of volunteers. The volunteers are well trained – it is not a case of people dropping in casually for a couple of hours and then not being seen for months. They regularly have to go through training and approval criteria to maintain their standards. They operate professionally even though they do so on an unpaid basis.

Unfortunately the same strict procedures that operate within the emergency services are not always evident in other areas where volunteers perform work which may overlap with that of the paid workforce. From a trade union perspective, in recognising that there is a

role for volunteers and the paid workforce, we are particularly conscious of the pressure that exists on all employers and governments to do more with less, and that in these situations there is a greater tendency to look for volunteers to do the work.

There is another area of volunteering which is particularly significant, and that is where the work would not otherwise occur at all. It is work that no government or employer would request; but it is invaluable and is performed because the volunteers themselves have an interest in a particular area. It is especially evident where people work within their own communities for the social benefit of citizens. Often the activity will develop to such a point where it can be expanded into something that requires the involvement of paid personnel.

For example, sometimes a small operation is initiated by community members in country areas when they realise that they are dependent upon themselves in times of disaster or potential disaster, and emergency support groups are formed. When the size of the operation grows to a certain point, they can be involved in what may be a multi-million dollar organisation, requiring equipment and buildings. The operation then starts to attract significant funding from government or the community. So something that was started as purely voluntary work can expand to the point where paid members of the workforce provide support.

Looking to the future

There are several factors that have an influence on what may occur in the future. One is the changing nature of the workforce, with many people now choosing to retire early or becoming unemployed or being made redundant. Whatever the situation, there will be a growing number of people not in paid employment, who have valuable skills and a contribution to make to their community.

Changes in technology now allow almost instantaneous cheap communication, not just locally, but world-wide, so the definition of community will vary. This will mean that communities can in fact be global, with many volunteer organisations having links and affiliations that go beyond the narrow boundaries of immediate communities. Often these links are interstate, and in many cases overseas. Amnesty International is an example. As well as this, many volunteers are able to undertake work at home, using private computers linked through the technology of the Internet to others around the world.

The Public Service Association and unions at large would like to see clearly negotiated policies that define under what circumstances

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volunteers are used by employers and governments, so there can be no misunderstanding about the important role played by both the paid workforce and the volunteers. Also it is important that appropriate guarantees and procedures are in place to ensure protection, not only for the paid workforce and the volunteers, but for members of the community that we all serve.