

Women in the International Year of Volunteers, 2001

This year has been proclaimed the International Year of Volunteers (IYV) by the United Nations General Assembly. This year has special significance in NSW as it was *Volunteering NSW* who proposed the idea to the United Nations in 1993. Throughout the year a number of activities are being held to foster recognition of volunteers, as well as facilitating, networking and promoting volunteering.

Support across government

The NSW Government theme for 2001 is *Active Citizens, Building Communities*. The Premier's Department *Strengthening Communities Unit* is the lead NSW government agency during IYV, encouraging a whole of government approach. *Volunteers NSW* will act as a secretariat for the considerable number of community based organisations providing volunteer services. See www.communitybuilders.nsw.gov.au and www.volunteering.com.au.

Women and men volunteers

The *International Year of Volunteers* is a chance to acknowledge women's contributions in volunteer and community sectors. It is also an opportunity to examine the gender issues that arise from volunteering.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, women are slightly more likely to volunteer than men are - 33 per cent compared with 31 per cent. Women, particularly middle aged women living in country regions, are highly represented in the volunteer sector. Women's volunteering in this age group is greatly tied to family commitments. Community /welfare organisations attract the largest numbers of women and sport/recreation organisations attract the largest number of men.

Women are twice as likely as men to prepare and serve food whereas men were nearly three times more likely to do repairs, maintenance and gardening and nearly twice as likely to be coaching and refereeing.

In a year, women contribute 72 hours (1.4 hours per week) to volunteering compared to 64 hours by men. Women give more hours than men to volunteering in health, education and religious organisations than men do. The 65-74 age group donate the greatest time each week, 2.4 hours by both women and men. Volunteering is spread across all age groups, with more than 25 percent of the population giving their time, falling to 18 per cent in the 75 and over age group.¹

Research on women and volunteering

In spite of the important role volunteers play in all our lives, there is very little research on what volunteering is all about. The Department for Women, the Premier's Department, New South Wales Council of Social Services, the University of Western Sydney and the University of Technology Sydney, are doing an Australian Research Council SPIRT research project on *The Experience of Volunteers in the Provision of*

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2001) *Voluntary work*, (Catalogue number 4441.0), Canberra

Human Services in NSW: A Regional Perspective. The two-year project examines the dynamic of volunteering from both a volunteer and client perspective.

The research findings will identify the conditions that need to be in place so that people receive volunteer services they are satisfied with. This research will also give information to volunteers to help negotiate volunteer roles that suit them and offer them personal development.

Community and government agencies working with volunteers will find this type of research useful, as will funding bodies who will have some guidance on what good volunteering practices are. Each of these outcomes is important to women because they are both volunteers and users of volunteer services.

Conversations with women volunteers

Generations of women have been active citizens and community leaders, building strong communities through hands on voluntary work. Young and older women today are no different. Here are some women's stories about volunteering.

Managers with a focus on others

Diana Humphries

Condell Park, Sydney

Years of volunteering: 40

Age: 58

I have been involved for some 40 years with volunteering, mostly in support of people with disabilities.

After many years of direct hands on support such as running youth clubs and helping children with disabilities, my volunteering role for the last 20 years has been on management committees of local organisations, which provide services for people with disabilities.

These services include residential and respite care for children and adults, day programs for adults, toy library, occasional care programs and general recreational programs.

Some of the volunteering roles I have had are:

- Helping with children who had significant disabilities at the local school
- Assisting with fundraising for a variety of causes
- Playing 'Auntie' to a young disabled boy receiving long term medical intervention for about two years
- Running youth groups for young people with disabilities
- Being on management committees for local organisations
- Providing music education in-service courses for teachers on a voluntary basis (20 years)
- Taking leadership roles on management committees
- Joining the Zonta club of Sydney West and supporting club activities in the community

My current roles are Chairman of the Management Committee of an organisation, which provides day programs for young adults with severe disabilities, and Board member of Zonta Club of Sydney West.

My initial volunteering actually provided a direction for my professional life, which has been in the education of children with significant disabilities.

Feminist activism through volunteering

Dr Hilarie Lindsay MBE, PhD (Syd)

Hunters Hill, Sydney

Years in volunteering: 70

I started volunteering with the junior Red Cross at the age of nine, encouraged by my mother, Gladys Dyson, herself a volunteer.

In 1972, while married with three children, director of a family business, and federal president of the Toy & Games Manufacturers Association of Australia and the Society of Women Writers (Australia), I joined the Sydney Club of Zonta International. As newsletter editor, I became an advocate for women. On business trips overseas I met Zontians in India, Singapore, Indonesia and Sri Lanka and spread the Zonta message to non-Zontians.

In Australia, despite ridicule and resentment, I waged campaigns against death duties levied on widows, and advertising which demeaned women. I fought for more women in parliament; for women to have access to hotel bars; for more public toilets for women; for the right for women to borrow money without a male guarantor; and to be described in legal documents by their profession rather than the term 'married women'.

Now as the oldest active member in Sydney Zonta Club, I see myself as a role model for younger women, in the hope that they will take up the challenge which working with a group of like-minded women can provide.

The benefits of an outward perspective

Sharyl Scott

Zonta Club of Macarthur

Denham Court, Sydney

Years in Volunteering: 30

Age: 46

I enjoy the social interaction with people working towards a vision. Main issues of moral importance to me are the issues of equity, equality, environment, education, health, anti-nuclear, anti-violence and rights for all especially women and children.

Volunteering experiences and roles I have held include:

- 1970s: President of a Film Society, Secretary for a Tramping Club
- Late 1970s-early 1980 Involvement with environment issues, anti-nuclear issues in New Zealand and women's issues
- Australia since 1980s: preschool and school committees, reading tutor, fetes, camps, excursions, designed playgrounds and gardens

- Technical help with school musicals and dance concerts
- Girl Guide committee member and Scout committee/parent helper
- Joined Zonta International in 1994, Secretary (1994-1995), Vice President (1996) and President (1997-98)
- Organised a Career Seminar at University of Western Sydney for 175 sixteen-seventeen year old girls
- In 2000, co-ordinated an Olympic Tree planting project in Camden and chaired a Zonta committee to organise a Zonta PR stand at the Paralympic Games
- Attended workshops, conferences and conventions overseas

My current roles are Vice-Chairman of Public Relations and Communications for District 24, Zonta International, Chair of the Organisation and Extension Committee for the Zonta Club of Macarthur and Leppington Public School Council executive member.

I believe society could not function without the level of voluntarism as it is. Women complete much of volunteer work. The losses in volunteering largely come through changes associated with moving, changing roles with many women working outside of the home, personal time restrictions or personal differences within the voluntary group. Personal safety is not an issue for many volunteers, except for those working in dangerous and health threatening situations. Correct educational training in procedures is vital.

Two of the many benefits for me are:

- The special significance in my life that the act of giving and making a difference to the lives of others, creates for me.
- Networking and sharing fellowship with people holding similar ideals and world views.

To people who thinking about volunteering, I'd say give time to a cause! The benefit will be increased awareness of the needs of others, and satisfaction with being a valuable, contributing citizen within society.

A family tradition

Olivia Sarah-Le Lacheur

Years in Volunteering: 10

Age: 30

My father was a member of Rotary International and my mother a member of Zonta International and Rotary International. Both organisations comprise business people and professionals dedicating their time, talent and expertise to the local and global community providing funds and service to improve the health, education, legal and professional status of individuals in need.

As I grew up, I was surrounded by people who spent weekends giving service to the community or running fundraisers to give money to various projects. I often joined in with the activities, and when I started working and became eligible for membership of Zonta International, I joined and started my "formal" volunteering contribution.

Within Zonta, I have been a member of three clubs (Ballarat, Sydney and Sydney Breakfast), that has given me the opportunity to work with many women volunteers. I have assisted in starting two Zonta clubs (Sydney Breakfast and Newcastle City), which has given me the opportunity to encourage others into volunteering. Through Zonta, I have given hundreds of hours of personal service to projects that aim to advance the status of women of all ages.

I was a volunteer at the Sydney 200 Olympics and currently volunteer for the Smith Family and UNICEF. I am also a member of the NSW Executive of Kids Help Line, working to provide a fully funded professional telephone counselling service for children.

Statistics tell us that women make up a large percentage of the world's disadvantaged, and as such they face issues such as homelessness, illiteracy, abuse and poverty. As a woman living in the 'lucky country', I have personal freedom and have been blessed with educational opportunities which allow me to earn a reasonable income, and therefore avoid the issues of homelessness, illiteracy and poverty. With my needs taken care of, I am able to focus devote my resources of time and money to help others change their lives and meet their basic needs.

The benefits of volunteering are many and the losses few!

Benefits include:

- personal satisfaction from knowing you have made a difference in touching the lives of others;
- an opportunity to meet and work with like-minded people on projects which directly benefit the local community;
- a feeling of satisfaction from providing funding for projects which would otherwise not exist as there is insufficient government funding

Losses include:

- the 'opportunity cost' of giving time as a volunteer and therefore foregoing time with family and friends, and
- the financial cost of paying for items needed as a volunteer

If tomorrow we woke up and didn't have volunteers, projects would not be able to operate at the same level. For example, the Smith Family managed to deliver Christmas Hampers to in Sydney because over 400 people volunteered to collect hampers and drive around Sydney to deliver them. Perhaps if there were no volunteers then people would have only received hampers if they could travel to a Smith Family office to collect them.

Making life richer

Dr Judith Dye

Burradoo

Number of years in volunteering: 67

Age: 77

At school, I was a volunteer in the Junior Red Cross and both my parents were volunteers.

My history of volunteering includes:

- Bowral Show Society - WOGU Secretary and President
- Berrinba District Pony Club – scorer, judge etc.
- Zonta Club of Sydney and Zonta International, 1966 – present
- Wannon School: Governor 1958 – 1997 and Chairman 1972-88
- National Trust of NSW Southern Highlands Committee President 1987 – present
- Bowral Hospital Auxiliary, 1985 – present, 2 year presidency
- Australian Federation of Uni., Southern Highlands Branch, 1989 – present
- Foundation member of Australian Group for the Scientific Study of Mental Deficiency, 1966 –85, 2 year presidency
- Hon. Medical Officer RAHC 1952-77
- Southern Highlands Olympic Committee 1998 – 2000
- Brahman Oval Volunteer 2001

The main areas I have focused on are equal opportunity for women, assisting health/disadvantaged people, equestrian activities and education.

I believe the benefits of volunteering are:

- widening one's circle of friends and acquaintances at a local, state, national and international level;
- the pleasure in seeing the benefits of one's activities in the lives of others; and
- Personal development.

Women form, by far, the greater proportion of all volunteers. The community would suffer greatly if there were none, as labour would have to be employed by local council, state and federal governments to take over their roles e. Meals on Wheels, Stroke Clubs, Clean up Australia workers, canteen duties etc. Fewer middle aged and younger women are available as they work full time, as well as raising a family and running their home.

To other women who may be considering volunteering, I say go for it, as the benefits far exceed the losses.

Volunteering is just part of my life

Ann Rocklea

Central Slopes & Plains/ City of Dubbo

Number of years in Volunteering: 39

Age: 64

On being asked the question 'How long have you been a volunteer?' I was amazed to find that upon reflection I had in fact been a volunteer since the age of 15.

This came about when I was a Girl Guide in the Land Ranger Section and we were asked if we would like to become visitors to an Old People's Home to visit elderly patients who did not have many visitors. So started many happy and sad occasions for me for approximately two years, only giving up the visiting when leaving school, starting work and of course, having boyfriends.

I next became a volunteer Assistant Warden at a Youth Hostel, having joined a cycling club which visited Youth Hostels over the United Kingdom on weekends and spending cycling holidays visiting Youth Hostels on the way. This I did until I got married.

After I had my children and they were at school, I volunteered to do Meals on Wheels and again became a volunteer visitor to elderly patients in the local nursing home, near to where I lived.

Since coming to Australia in 1980, after a period of settling in, I am again a volunteer with Meals on Wheels and am also the Community Activity Co-ordinator on a voluntary basis, responsible for arranging activities for the Seniors in the Dubbo area where I now live.

It would seem that having starting my volunteerism with elderly people, it has had an effect on my life and career – having been a Welfare Officer, Home Care Manager and my present position of Community Activities Co-ordinator.

I have always enjoyed what I have done, which has given me great satisfaction in working for the communities in which I have lived, by giving back something in a small way of what has been done for me over the years. I believe that the elderly people are an untapped source of information, as they are people who have seen many facets of life, which is so easily forgotten in this modern age. I think that having come from a rural background in England, where it is the norm to help each other, has been a factor in what I have done throughout my life. I enjoy talking to people, helping people and seeing them enjoy themselves even if it is only a day trip now and again by coach, or playing Bingo with others of a similar situation, making new friendships for them with others who have the same problems.

I believe that without women volunteers, this country would not be what it is today. Mateship is alive and well but needs a helping hand now and again, and if I can do this, then I am more than satisfied that I am a volunteer.

The satisfaction of helping others

Phyllis Buchanan

Wentworth Falls, NSW

Years in Volunteering: 53

Age: 68

I became a Sunday school teacher at the age of 15, as being a Christian I felt I would like to help others learn about Christianity. I have also worked in a school canteen and was President of the School Ladies Auxiliary.

Volunteer roles I've had in the past include:

- President and Treasurer of my church and am involved with church committees and cake stalls etc.
- President and Cultural Officer of my branch of the Country Women's Association (CWA)
- Blue Mountains Group – Group Representative to State Secretary, Publicity Officer

If we did not volunteer, the work would not be accomplished. The benefits of volunteering are the friendships, the satisfaction of helping others and a job well done. I would encourage others as one can only gain from being a volunteer – it is very rewarding.

Recognising the contributions of volunteers

A major theme this year is recognising the contributions of volunteers. A positive and public way to do this is to nominate women for annual awards, such as the National Australia Day Council Awards, Telstra Business Women's Awards, Rural Women's Awards or Australian Honours awards. To find out more about these awards and others, go to the Office of the Status of Women website at www.osw.gov.au for information, nomination forms and contact numbers.

To find out more about volunteering

- Volunteering NSW: www.volunteering.com.au
- Volunteering Australia: www.volunteeringaustralia.org/
- community builders: www.communitybuilders.nsw.gov.au
- United Nations: www.iyv2001.org/ (put DFW research there)
- GoVolunteer! (matching service): www.govolunteer.com.au
- Department of Family and Community Services (Federal): www.iyv2001.gov.au/
- National Women's Justice Coalition Volunteer and Intern Program: www.nwjc.org.au/volunteer.html
- Energize: www.energizeinc.com/welcome
- Volunteers - The Capital of the Millenium: www.volunteer.nl/
- International Association for Volunteer Effort (IAVE): www.iave.org/