

INSIDE OUT

PERCEPTIONS OF VOLUNTEERING
IN A MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY

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VOLUNTEERING SA INC

Inc

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Volunteer Centre of South Australia Inc

June 1993

PREFACE

Too often when we think of volunteering in Australia we think of volunteers from only one ethnic background, Anglo-Australian, and consider primarily their understanding and experiences of volunteering. Yet Australia, with its rich multicultural population, has people from over a hundred and forty ethnic backgrounds who volunteer. Much of this is within their own ethnic community association, sporting club or school committee, as well as in the wider community.

INSIDE OUT developed as part of the Volunteer Centre of South Australia's VIFA – Volunteering Is For All (Multicultural) project. The Office of Multicultural Affairs funded this project that expanded our knowledge base of volunteering. It is a unique collection of the perceptions of volunteering of people from diverse backgrounds and draws on their experiences both within their country of origin and here in Australia.

It has been written for all people interested in volunteering. It will be particularly useful for managers of volunteer programs and their organisations, and those concerned with promoting and developing effective volunteering.

The reader is offered the opportunity to consider volunteering from the viewpoint of people from over 26 ethnic backgrounds. This includes:

- their experiences of volunteering in their country of birth and here in Australia;
- their reasons for volunteering;
- how being in Australia has affected their perception of volunteering;
- their concerns for the future.

In so doing, people's experiences of volunteering are shown to be worthy of notice.

We believe this is the beginning process, the "tip of the iceberg", and it is our goal that the reader will be encouraged to continue developing an awareness of the ways in which perceptions of volunteering vary. We anticipate that such growing awareness will lead to the continuation of this valuable work and to the establishment of appropriate volunteering policies and practices for our multicultural community.

Everyone involved in this project felt privileged to have listened to people's stories. Our total understanding of volunteering has been enriched, reminding us of the universality of the human spirit. It has been a challenging and rewarding experience and we are excited to be able to share these stories with you, the reader.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

INSIDE OUT resulted from the efforts of many people and was for them a new experience. Their enthusiasm and the inspiration gleaned from the stories told are captured in this work.

We wish to thank whole-heartedly the people with whom we consulted. Their generosity is great, and their stories have touched our hearts and been an inspiration to us all. Let us introduce them to you.

Adult Migrant Education Students:

Young Jun Seo, Eman Habib, Samir Beshara, Mary Hanna, Leokadia Sieslinska, Soontree Sowana, Anat Inwood.

Committee members of Federation of Spanish Speaking Communities in SA.

Association of the Hungarian Aged and Invalid Persons in SA Inc.: Maria Nagy, Istvan Nagy, Maria Clappis, Zoltan Bihari.

Northern Region Ethnic Australia Aged and Invalid Care Association members: Harry Hirst, Luba Lazootin, Rose Doumis, Mr Matisons, Grazia Grasso, Verna Delfino, Laura Greco.

Members of the Maltese Community in the Northern Region.

Filipino Womens Support Group.

Chinese Welfare Services.

Indo-Chinese Australian Womens Association.

Mrs I. Picheta, Polish Women's Association.

Mrs J. Kozak, Polish Link with Seniors, Ottoway Branch.

Mr Peter Lazarevich, United Ethnic Communities.

Mr Efthymios (Tim) Ladas, Greek Orthodox Community of the Nativity of Christ. Port Adelaide and Environs, Seniors Club.

Mr and Mrs Czerwinski, Polish Link with Seniors, Westbourne Park.

Mrs Wendy Pusonjic, Serbian Community of SA.

Mrs Zofia Mrotek, Polish Link with Seniors, Polonia Branch.

Staff of the Volunteer Centre of SA:

Jacek Przychodzen, Shantha Raman, Sarala Kiru, Monika Lieberenz, Messalina Pasman, Irene Moutzouris, Annie Pik Kin Cheung, Ursula Forde.

INTRODUCTION

The Volunteer Centre of South Australia believes that volunteering is one means of encouraging a more democratic, caring, informed, dynamic and co-operative society. This is captured in the Centre's VIFA (Volunteering Is For All) program which was adopted to draw awareness to the reality that there are opportunities for all people, of whatever age, ability or background, to volunteer in our community.

The following factors encouraged the Centre in 1991 to develop VIFA with a multicultural perspective:

- awareness that many people from diverse backgrounds were accessing the Centre's Referral Service
- lack of knowledge of different cultural perceptions of volunteering
- recognition that Australia is a multicultural society
- awareness that valuing diversity and maximising participation require new skills and a broader knowledge base.

The innovative VIFA (Multicultural) project, with funding from the Office of Multicultural Affairs through its Community Relations Strategy, aimed to enhance community relations by enabling people of different cultural backgrounds to volunteer together and thereby get to know and understand one another better. Both mainstream and ethno-specific organisations were encouraged to reconsider their perception of the "traditional" volunteer and were assisted to develop volunteer policies and practices which reflect our multicultural community.

In the early stages of the project it became apparent that, in the main, when the Centre talked about volunteering it was with an Anglo-Australian perspective. In order to promote multicultural policies and practices effectively, the Centre had to consider people's different ideas and perceptions of volunteering. To gain an insight into, and develop knowledge of this, it became necessary to talk with people about their individual experiences and perceptions. It was a matter of listening and learning.

To give the task the attention it required, a final year Social Work Student joined the project for a 15 week placement.

Consideration was given to including a wide range of people in the consultations, recognising that newly arrived people would bring different experiences and perceptions of volunteering from those who had lived in this country for a longer period. Consequently, it was decided to speak with:

- Adult Migrant Education Service students, representing newly arrived people.
- People who had arrived in Australia within the last 10 years.
- People who arrived between 20 and 30 years ago.
- A balance of women and men, young and old.
- People who worked in the different interest areas of volunteering (e.g. health, welfare, arts, education, sport, the environment, etc.)
- Staff of the Volunteer Centre who were born overseas.

A model of consultation was adopted to be sensitive to the needs of the ethnic community organisations and to acknowledge their time and effort. Feedback from the people involved was very positive. The process for consultation was as follows:

- The project officer met with significant people recognised within the ethnic community sector, who could both introduce her and provide information to people on their network about the project.
- These significant people suggested appropriate people within community groups to target, and made the initial contact.
- Then a meeting was arranged for the project officer to meet the ethnic community representatives and gain their confidence and trust.
- Once trust had been gained, a follow-up meeting was arranged either with the same people or others they had invited. The venue for this meeting was chosen by the people themselves and often was on their own territory. An invitation to the Volunteer Centre was always extended.
- The consultations were always held in an informal atmosphere, and people knew
 - (a) why they were being consulted:
to broaden the depth of knowledge about volunteering in South Australia;
 - (b) how the information would be used:
to write part of the final report of the project, which would be available to the wider community, including government;
 - (c) the planned outcomes of the consultation:
to recognise their contribution to volunteer effort in this multicultural community.
- Following each consultation a written record of the conversations was made and sent to those consulted for their comment.
- This was followed with a phone call, which either confirmed the content or noted necessary changes. In the case of the latter, the process was repeated until agreement was reached.
- Once all consultations had been completed, in order to capture the excitement of the process and people's enthusiasm for the project, those consulted were invited to meet each other and the staff of the Volunteer Centre to plan their part of the program for International Volunteer Day, when their participation in the Project would be acknowledged.
- All the people with whom we consulted were happy to be referred to in the report.

Individual and group participants came from the following countries: Britain, China, Chile, Egypt, El Salvador, Germany, Greece, Hong Kong, Hungary, India, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Korea, Latvia, Malta, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Spain, Thailand, Vietnam, Yugoslavia.

As far as possible the content has been expressed in the spirit of people's own words. Extracts from conversations and quotes from written material provided by some participants are also presented, in order to further portray people's experiences and perceptions. It must be stressed that these stories do not represent the view of any ethnic community or country. Each person or group of people has contributed their unique and individual view, telling their story as they have lived it.

MEANING AND IMAGES OF VOLUNTEERING

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hen talking to people about their perceptions and experiences of volunteering, it was necessary to be clear about our definition. Volunteering has three essential elements:

- It provides a service to the community,
- It is done of one's own free will, and
- It is done without monetary reward.

We initially asked people to talk about ways in which they volunteered. In terms of the above definition, some people understood what we were referring to when we spoke about volunteering, because they had a similar concept in their country. For others, there was difficulty in translating the word "volunteering" into their own language. Sometimes it had a different meaning altogether. Voluntary work was referred to in many ways including helping, charity work, community work, social work or an act of charity.

For some people who came to Australia, the concept of volunteering was unknown. This was true for Shantha and Sarala, because, in India, volunteering was not something of which they were aware. People who could get employment, worked, but there was no concept at all of voluntary work. Sometimes people would help students in teaching institutions to practise their work, but this was known as "social work". Through the National Social Service, students at educational institutions were involved in community work such as helping aged people. Others contributed to charity work through the programs of Mother Teresa or government-organised programs for the care of lepers and poor children. When Shantha and Sarala came to Australia and were told by friends about voluntary work, they were unable to understand the concept. They began to recognise its value only when they became involved.

Many people did not know of the volunteering that occurred in their country of origin. Some became aware of it during times of crisis, as Ursula from Ireland found:

Volunteering was not something I was aware of around me although I'm sure it went on. I did not know of any central volunteering body in Belfast. However in 1969, with the outbreak of political violence and many people made homeless, hundreds of people from both religious persuasions volunteered to help the people in need. I worked in a Monastery, which was being used as a refugee centre for homeless families.

Over the last 20 years many voluntary bodies have been set up in Northern Ireland to liaise and communicate the problems to the relevant authorities.

In Vietnam, volunteering was known as "helping" and, according to people spoken to at the Indo-Chinese Australian Women's Association (ICHAWA), a great deal of this work occurred. They believed that this may have been due to the fact that there were no social services in Vietnam and so the family

became central as a major means of support. Helping occurred in many different areas, such as cleaning and taking care of school grounds; the young teaching older, uneducated people; environmental work such as taking care of roads, cleaning, weeding and planting. In the rural areas families would take it in turns to help each other with planting and harvesting crops. Now, in Australia, people from Vietnam continue to assist each other and the community, and this is more likely to be referred to as "volunteering" or "Thien-nguyen".

In many countries, volunteer work was carried out daily, but people did not identify their work as volunteering. Laura, Grazia and Verna noted that helping others occurred informally at the community or family level in Italy and was a part of their culture and an expression of their care for humanity, which had been handed down over the years. It would not have been known as volunteering. It wasn't until they came to Australia that they realised that what they were doing was referred to here as volunteering.

VOLUNTEERING WITH OR WITHOUT CHOICE

In many countries with a communist or totalitarian government it appeared that the use of the word "volunteer" did not always fit with our definition, and hence had strong influences on people's perceptions.

Maria Nagy told us that prior to the second World War people in Hungary were working up to 90 hours per week just to survive. This left little time to consider volunteering. Post-war, however, the government, which was then communist, "invited" students and workers to donate one day a week from their 6-day working week "for the peace of the world". For students, the continuation of their studies depended on their "volunteering" this work. They were also constrained to "donate" four weeks of their holidays. The word "volunteering" in Hungary has come to convey the work that "must be done" either for the army or for the state. Maria believes that many changed from seeing this as a constraint to the opportunity to gain privileges. Their perception of "free choice" therefore remains somewhat different from the mainstream in Australia and is reflected in their hesitation to volunteer.

People from other backgrounds have had similar experiences.

Peter Lazarevich who was born in Yugoslavia, said that:

Before World War II, volunteering was widespread in charity work and helping to look after the sick and handicapped. In socialist Yugoslavia there was a great deal of volunteering in the new highways and railway lines (though some would argue that there was some coaxing and pressuring).

Many people's view of volunteering stems from the attitude promoted by the government. For example, Mrs Picheta found that prior to the war in Poland, people were willing to volunteer to help the poor in the community.

“One person from Poland said that he believed that by making volunteering compulsory, the 'spirit of imagination and volunteering was destroyed'.”

Following the war, volunteering was made “compulsory” under communism with people being “asked” to work on Sunday “for their beautiful country”. There was no choice, as the alternative was to go to prison.

One person from Poland stated that he believed that by making volunteering compulsory, the “spirit of imagination and volunteering was destroyed”, and that it had “no value under communism”. He believed that “unless there was something wrong with their heads”, no-one volunteered. During the consultations, we were asked by one man from another communist country whether the Australian Government kept a record of people’s voluntary work.

Although people who have lived in countries where volunteering, as one woman put it, was “ideologically compulsory” and was for the community rather than for the individual, some could see the benefits. A person from Romania, for example, believed that, although the “noble activity” of volunteering became compulsory after the second World War, it achieved “a lot of great things”, such as building tunnels, hydro-centres and factories which changed the country.

When Jacek migrated to Australia from Poland, he found the concept of working for no money “alien” to him. He came from a country where, according to him, the philosophy of the totalitarian regime insisted that the government provide for all citizens in every way, hence excluding the need for volunteers. Mr and Mrs Czerwinski agreed. They have seen a marked difference between people such as themselves, who migrated from Poland before the war and came with the belief that volunteering was an integral way of expressing concern for each other, and newly arrived people who, after four and a half decades of communist rule, could only identify with Jacek’s perceptions.

In Israel, people could choose to volunteer in various areas of work. Kibbutz are settlements where groups of people from many different countries live and work together. Minority ethnic groups support newly arrived people, and religious communities help people in need. Youth groups are very popular. Anat told us about the Scout group to which she belonged and the community focus it had. However, looking back, she believed that both the individual and the community gained much from volunteering, but that there was also a great deal of pressure on young people to volunteer. Students in Years 10 and 11 were required to volunteer for 2 hours a week each year. This was called an “individual obligation”, and there was no room for question because it was considered part of schooling and a requirement if students were to receive their certificate. It was compulsory to serve in the army – the alternative was to go to prison. Some people who had medical or religious reasons were exempt. However, many people wished to serve their country and would even volunteer for dangerous duties.

VOLUNTEERING DESPITE CONSTRAINTS

Helping under communism was not encouraged, particularly on an individual basis, according to the people we spoke with at the Chinese Welfare Services. One example we were given was of a man who offered money to help a person suffering from acute appendicitis. The Chinese government suspected him of being an imperialist and punished him. Despite this, volunteering occurred informally as people helped their neighbours and relatives. There was organised helping too, which was encouraged by regional clans, with the activities contributing to the community life.

We heard of similar experiences in other countries. A woman from El Salvador told us that volunteering was not encouraged as an organised effort by the military government there. If people attempted to organise groups, they were suspected of being activists and sent to prison. People had to work to survive and there was also a civil war in the country, but volunteering occurred on an informal level and through organisations such as churches, nursing homes and the Red Cross. She believed that this was due to the warm and caring nature of the Salvadorean people who helped their families, friends and neighbours. However, students were required to do voluntary work in their chosen field as part of their education.

We spoke to people from Chile, Spain, El Salvador and Peru who were committee members of the Federation of Spanish Speaking People in SA. Those from Chile indicated that, before the coup in 1973, the Chilean government encouraged and supported volunteering for reasons of economy and for the country itself. People worked in areas of health, education, and even heavy construction. They grew food for cooperatives. After the coup, Chilean people lived under an oppressive regime and experienced much in the way of injustice. "It was as a response to that injustice that volunteering was born" we were told. Human nature prevailed as people helped each other, organised themselves into groups and became a powerful voice, challenging the government. Their activities were perceived as a threat to the government's position and it set out to destroy them.

AN ACT OF CHARITY

Other people saw volunteering as a part of everyday life and their ideas have continued in Australia. A group of Maltese people said there was no word for volunteering in Malta, but that the act of volunteering was considered to be part of being and living in the community. They helped their neighbours, friends and family and even people they did not know. This was sometimes referred to as charity work.

Many people in Korea were involved in voluntary work. University Students' Clubs arranged voluntary work during vacation, particularly in the environmental area, and the church assisted poor people in the community and overseas. A great deal of informal volunteering also occurred beyond the needs of family and friends.

The word "volunteer" in the Philippines translates to "Kawang-Gawa" which was explained by the Filipino Womens Support Group as meaning "an act of charity" and seen by them as part of every day life. Messalina, a member of the group, told us that:

Volunteering has a high status in the hearts and the minds of the Filipino people. People just come together when there is a call for help or need among the neighbourhoods in the community. It seems they are brought up to lend a helping hand to one another, perhaps for many varied reasons such as the close family ties and that the country economically is very poor. For them it is an "act of charity".

Whilst there was no volunteer centre as such in the Philippines, volunteering occurred both informally and formally. Voluntary work was arranged through the church, the "Legion of Mary" and by the local community leaders, known as "Baranagay Capitan". The volunteer tasks that people were involved with in the Philippines included environmental work, such as planting trees, removing rubbish and cleaning canals. Volunteers visited elderly people and helped them in their homes. Youth groups, Red Cross and sporting activities were other areas where people volunteered. They also responded to individual needs, such as building a house, or to a national crisis or disaster.

GOVERNMENT SUPPORT

There were examples of countries where the government actively encouraged volunteering, and people were free to choose to be involved. Soontree talked about volunteering that occurred in Thailand through the King's and Queen's projects. Volunteering for the King's projects was highly regarded and very popular. The projects were mainly carried out in rural areas and involved such tasks as helping people, advising on agricultural matters, treating patients and assisting in emergency and crisis situations. During school holidays, student associations also carried out voluntary work in rural areas, including digging wells, feeding animals and teaching personal hygiene. Soldiers on duty around the country's boundary spent their free time teaching children in that area.

The Egyptian government encouraged its people to volunteer. It valued the new initiatives which were established in the community. Eman told us that a Prime Minister, who had encouraged university and secondary students to become involved in environmental work, joined them in their work. According to Samir, Mary and Eman, soldiers had to "give" 18 months' service, whilst officers remained for three years. Before women could work in the public service, they were required to produce a certificate that acknowledged that they had been involved in voluntary work for a year. The same was not true in the private sector. However, women received exemption from this requirement if they had qualifications such as teaching or medicine, which were in demand. The religious communities organised voluntary work for people in need. Services included educating children, operating health clinics, homes for aged and intellectually disabled people and shelters for young orphans.

MOTIVATION TO VOLUNTEER

Having explored the various meanings attributed to the concept of volunteering, we turn to the reasons why the people we spoke with became involved in voluntary work, both in their country of origin and here in Australia. People were motivated for generally more than one reason. Some of these included:

MUTUAL SUPPORT AND CARE



Many people became involved in voluntary work to provide support or to care for others.

Leszek, an English language student from Poland told us, "Man lives in a community and should not be alone. Common life makes strength". A fellow student, Young, supported this. He believed it was "natural" to help one another. His religious beliefs motivated him to achieve change in the community through working together rather than as individuals.

Mr Matisons was concerned during the war about soldiers returning home and being "rubbished". He wanted to ensure that when the Latvian soldiers returned they would be supported, particularly those who were sick and invalid. He became a founding member of the Latvian Relief Society which continues today and has extended to about 16 countries around the world.

Mutual support and caring were also identified as motivating factors behind the establishment of the Association of the Hungarian Aged and Invalid Persons in South Australia. Directly after the war they identified the need to have a place to meet and so finding premises became a priority. With substantial numbers of the Hungarian Community ageing, it quickly became evident that an association providing social activities and care for older people would be needed.

Similar situations existed for many groups that migrated to Australia following the war. This was so for Mrs Mrotek, the President of Polish Link with Seniors, Polonia Branch, whose motivation to volunteer for the association was to care for members, particularly as they grew older and become isolated and lonely. Mr Czerwinski agreed with this. The work of his Westbourne Park branch of Polish Link with Seniors focussed on people supporting and caring for each other. For Tim Ladas, volunteering was an essential part of establishing the infrastructure for the Greek community in Australia. This also occurred in Adelaide's Maltese community, where social, recreational and educational clubs were set up in response to unmet needs.

“(In Chile) it was the needy who helped others and whose motivation was to address the injustices committed against the people.”

RESPONSE TO A NEED

People were inspired and at times compelled to volunteer in order to address injustices and/or unmet needs in their community.

There was a strong class system in Chile where the wealthy were not willing to give to those in need. Rather, their motivation was for the recognition and status they would receive, we were told. It was the needy who helped others and whose motivation was to address the injustices committed against the people.

In the Philippines, Messalina saw the people unite to challenge a corrupt government and watched them “working hand in hand together to defend the country and dethrone the President, Ferdinand Marcos.” For Messalina, it showed “how the People Power won and stood up as a power of one.” Some Filipino women had organised their own support group since arrival in Australia. They came together as a group to maintain their sense of community and to care for each other.

According to Mrs Picheta, the Polish Women’s Association began in response to the needs of Polish people in camps across Germany. Parcels and money were sent to them by the Association. The success of the Association’s work was acknowledged by the Church in Poland, which highlighted the needs of Polish families there and so their work broadened. Eventually, there was a recognition that Polish families within South Australia also needed their support and, in fact, the Association extended its mandate to support other people in times of crisis, such as earthquake and famine.

Many people were motivated to volunteer in response to a disaster or crisis. In El Salvador, people were aware of the needs in their society, but were not able to make the commitment to volunteer for a variety of reasons. However, when people were left homeless following an earthquake, there were many offers of food, clothing, shelter and, in some cases, practical assistance so that people could rebuild their homes. Vinh, from ICHAWA told us of similar responses to crises in Vietnam.

In some countries where volunteering was “compulsory”, people continued to volunteer informally. Maria Nagy believed that people from Hungary were hesitant to volunteer as they were “constrained”. She nevertheless found that many individuals still felt motivated to help one another informally. Leokadia also found this in Poland where “compulsory volunteering” was not popular, but people were motivated to help others who did not have much support. For example, Leokadia and her sister helped a friend of their mother who was a sick elderly man without family, by assisting him in the garden, cleaning, preparing food and shopping.

PERSONAL BELIEFS

Some people became involved in volunteering due to their personal belief.

Messalina saw volunteering as:

...More of a virtue to me because it is part of my human nature. It started when I was the Social Worker Aid when I realised the hardships and plight of the poorest among the poor, the Leprosy victims [and I] helped them to survive and not to be an outcast, but a part of society.

TO GIVE SOMETHING BACK

For some people the motivating factor for volunteering is to "give something back" to the community.

Sometimes people wanted to give something back to a particular organisation. For many volunteers at ICHAWA, this was their motivating factor. As newly arrived people they were extremely busy meeting their survival needs, and the Association supported them. They were greeted at the airport, provided with accommodation and furniture, and assisted to become familiar with available services. Once settled, they were keen to volunteer themselves, as they wanted to repay the help that had been given.

For Wendy and Nenad their motivation for volunteering for the Serbian Community was to help those who had given so much through their volunteer work over the years. They have been actively involved in the planning and building of the Serbian Hostel at Pennington. Their aim is to create a "Little Serbia" for elderly people, and they designed the building with this in mind.

For others, there was a feeling of giving something back to society in general, particularly if they were receiving social security benefits and were unaccustomed to this in their country. For example, when Jacek found himself out of work with time on his hands, he decided to donate some of his time and expertise, as he could see a need. While he was receiving the JobSearch allowance, he "felt an unreasonable guilt for receiving money for nothing". Members of the Filipino Women's Support Group, whilst appreciative of the benefits they received, also wanted to reciprocate.

A SENSE OF BELONGING

For newly arrived people, volunteering provided an opportunity to "belong" in their wider community. Thus, some of the people at ICHAWA chose to volunteer in schools and, as a result, both parents and their children felt more accepted as part of the school community.

Annie was one of the students we spoke with from Adult Migrant Education Service. Like many of them, she became involved in volunteer work in order to learn about her community. It also provided an opportunity for her to practise English conversation and listening skills and to gain work experience. While her mother did not like her volunteering in Hong Kong, she recognised the benefits that Annie gained from volunteering here, as she saw her feeling at home in Australia.

PERSONAL SATISFACTION AND ENJOYMENT

Many people experienced volunteering as a two-way process. Whilst their work helped others and contributed to the community, they also enjoyed the personal satisfaction and fulfilment it brought. For some, like Ursula and Irene, the opportunity to feel they were doing something constructive with their time was particularly rewarding. Zofia told us that her aunt volunteered to teach language to children in Poland as a way of leaving something of herself.

Others gained a deep sense of satisfaction from helping people enjoy themselves. Tim Ladas remarked, "If the people have a smile on their face, I'm happy". He believed that after the many years of hard work establishing themselves in the community, the members of the Seniors Club of the Greek Orthodox Community at Port Adelaide should have some time to enjoy social activities and outings.

Mr Matisons was involved in setting up a Latvian theatre company in Adelaide, because many Latvian people enjoyed acting and singing. Initially the group was quite small and all of the work, whether acting, singing, or stage work, brought satisfaction and enjoyment to the volunteers.

Messalina's story also told of volunteering as way of giving direction in her life and increasing her self esteem:

I came to Australia on August 23, 1988. For six and a half years I was a devoted housewife to a man who was a very good provider though a very possessive type. I lost my outgoing image and instead I felt isolated, depressed and dumb. When he died of cancer in 1988, I became despondent and lost my sense of direction. Anyhow, it didn't take long for me to find ways to overcome my fear. My motivation was to survive with my daughter so I started to open up my image again. I introduced myself to the Filipino community; I introduced myself to the neighbourhood and to the school where my daughter is attending and I volunteered to do the shopping of an elderly Hungarian lady. I volunteered to assist in the School Library and to be friendly to the Latin American people to help them understand the school activities. I attended some training with the support and guidance of the Filipino Grant in Aid Worker. I became an Ethnic Information Officer and active community leader to a group of women. Now I also work at the Volunteer Centre. Slowly I regain my self confidence and my self esteem becomes healthy once again.

VOLUNTEERING IN AUSTRALIA

People's motivation and commitment to volunteering clearly didn't cease when they arrived in this country. Without volunteer effort, communities would not have been established. Much of this work continues within specific ethnic community groups. Some new initiatives with a multicultural approach are described here.

GETTING ESTABLISHED

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any people indicated that their motivation to volunteer was to support members of their community and address identified needs. These were also the reasons for establishing their organisation, where they could meet together and help each other in the difficult process of resettlement.

Peter Lazarevich, the Executive Director of United Ethnic Communities, migrated to Australia from Yugoslavia. He believed, "volunteering has been modelled in the community as the only means by which each community could establish itself and maintain its culture and support of each other." Many migrants, he said, felt that on their arrival here in Australia, there were precious few helpers to meet them and their needs at the time, "except some organisations with ulterior motives who tried to promote their own causes, the genuineness of their help being in doubt."

From the beginning, the Greek Orthodox Community at Port Adelaide worked together. They petitioned and lobbied to establish a church. Since that time a second church has been built to meet the needs of the growing community. This occurred through the generous donations of members and an extensive amount of volunteer labour. The people who had contributed much of the work and effort to establish the community were getting older and wanted to enjoy their achievements. In response to this, the Seniors Club was established in 1989 with 17 members. Since then the club has grown and currently has 220 members, both men and women. Some meet weekly for activities and also enjoy social outings arranged by the committee. Tim Ladas, their President, believes that volunteering offers people the opportunity to become involved and is seen as an important part of their community life. Interestingly, it was an indication of the nature of volunteering that this very contribution enhanced the quality of life for those both directly and indirectly involved.

The majority of the Maltese people we spoke with migrated to Australia around 1950. With the support of a priest and from hopeful beginnings, there are now between 13 and 15 clubs and committees, all of which were established through voluntary work. Community members are involved in many voluntary activities. These include childcare, office bearing positions in organisations and clubs, cooking, driving and shopping, ethnic schools and dance groups, radio

work, bookkeeping and organising special events. Volunteering was considered an integral part of everyday life in Malta and is equally valued here in Australia.

Although there are a number of groups within the Filipino community, the Filipino Womens Support Group came together in response to their specific need to support one another. Their time in Australia ranged from 6 months to 15 years. The experience of organising themselves to meet their own needs reflected their situation in the Philippines.

Becoming settled in a new country is a difficult task. We spoke to man who had migrated from Spain, whose own experience motivated him to become involved in helping other newly arrived people settle. Limited support was offered by the government here when people arrived and there was little follow-up. Consequently, he arranged to meet people at the airport, settled them in, and helped them to understand what services were available and how to access them. He told us that he found the concept of volunteering in Australia similar to that in Spain, where his voluntary work included helping aged people with their shopping and meals. However, Spanish people, he said, felt that their lack of language skills put them at a disadvantage in the community, and therefore it was difficult to organise social action.

The Association of Hungarian Aged and Invalid Persons in South Australia was established to care for the senior people in the community. The Association has 272 members with an average age of 65. Between 65 and 95 people attend the Day Centre for activities on Wednesdays and for a three-course hot meal on Fridays. The committee plans and arranges recreational activities for the members and provides services required by senior people of their community. A bus is used to transport members to and from the Association. A monthly newsletter is published and people are visited in their homes, hospitals and nursing homes. Gifts are delivered to old and lonely members. The Association responds to referrals of Hungarian people from social workers and other services providers, all in a voluntary capacity.

The Polish Womens Association began 40 years ago, and was established to help Polish people in the German camps. Their work has now extended to Polish people in both Poland and Australia. Currently the Association has a membership of 80 women, most of whom have been in Australia since the second World War. The 20 active members, who are mostly over 60 years, meet monthly to plan and arrange visits to people through their hospital and home visitor schemes. Members are also involved in fundraising activities, such as cake stalls and bazaars. They respond to requests by other service providers to greet and settle newly arrived Polish people.

Samir, a recently arrived migrant from Egypt, is currently in the process of getting his pharmacy qualifications recognised. Since arriving in Australia he has been assisted by a pharmacist who is helping him to understand about his profession in Australia. Samir believes volunteering is important and he is keen to become involved in Australia because it will help him to understand English. It will also provide an opportunity for him to know the system and find out about the people and their society. He believes it is the best way to become established in a new community.

VOLUNTEERING WITHIN

Having worked so hard to become established in their new country, it is not surprising that many people continue to work within their own ethnic community organisation. For those who migrated between 20 and 30 years ago, taking care of the ageing requires their time and commitment.

Laura, Verna and Grazia volunteer exclusively within their own ethnic community organisation. They work at the Italian Cultural Centre in Salisbury which was established by the Sisters of their church as a social activity centre for the aged and infirm in the local Italian community. Outings are arranged for members and a program is planned for visiting the sick.

We spoke to some members of the seven Polish Link with Seniors groups in Adelaide. Each of the groups is affiliated with another organisation. This may be a sporting club, church, or another seniors association. Mr and Mrs Czerwinski are kept busy within their association, organising the fortnightly meetings, complete with a hot meal, transporting the elderly people to and from and visiting sick people. Members of their association make beautiful craft items each month, which they proudly display and sell at functions. Similarly, Mrs Kozak works within her association to meet the needs of elderly Polish people. Like other Seniors groups, they too produce a newsletter, to keep their community informed about activities and issues of interest.

People in the Latvian community were concerned about the needs of the blind people and so some of them began to record books onto tapes for these people to enjoy. We learnt about a national network which distributes the taped books all over the world.

In Australia, groups grew in response to the specific needs of the Maltese people. They continue to volunteer as part of their everyday life and find that most of their work is within their families and their community. However, as the younger members of the community marry this pattern is beginning to change.

VOLUNTEERING: THE WIDER COMMUNITY

It would be true to say, that because of the need to provide support for each other following migration, many older people maintained a feeling of obligation to continue to work within their own community. Nevertheless, many had a broader focus and spoke about their experiences in the wider community.

The Polish Women's Association works predominantly within the Polish community, but also provides support to other people in need, such as victims of disaster. The president, Mrs. Picheta is involved in many other voluntary activities in the Polish community, for example, writing for the Polish Newspaper

“Luba, of Russian descent, found that most people seemed to work exclusively for their own ethnic group and that it was difficult to be accepted by others.”

and conducting a monthly two-hour program on radio PBA-FM. She also represents the Polish community on a wider community level, through the Multicultural Dementia Advisory committee and the Teresa Nursing Home Advisory Committee.

We spoke with Maria Clappis who works as a volunteer for the Royal Adelaide Hospital. She came to the Volunteer Centre of SA seeking volunteer work and was subsequently referred. She worked at the hospital as a Lavender Lady and later also joined the Association of the Hungarian Aged and Invalid Persons in South Australia, where she became Vice President.

Mary and Eman volunteer in the Egyptian community. In their church, they teach the Arabic and Egyptian language to the children in Sunday School. Eman also volunteers at St. Aloysius college teaching Arabic. Young from Korea, volunteers in his church for the poor of the world. He became aware that many older people in the community were lonely because they had little contact with others and so he is befriending them.

We discovered other examples of people who volunteered both for their ethnic organisation and the wider community. Tim Ladas is President of his Seniors Club for the Greek Orthodox Community, whilst also volunteering for the Renal Unit at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, where he visits patients and helps with fundraising. He has also been involved on the committees at Woodville High School and Port Adelaide Primary School, where he established the Greek Saturday School. His enthusiasm was well directed into fundraising. Through one of these functions, the Greek Parents School Committee was able to donate 12 traditional Greek costumes to the school.

Luba, of Russian descent, found that most people seemed to work exclusively for their own ethnic group and that it was difficult to be accepted by others. After much perseverance, she was able to break down the barriers. Luba knew little about volunteer work outside her community. Her study at the University of South Australia made her more aware of what was both available and needed in the general community and she became involved in volunteer work. Luba works in the office at the Migrant Resource Centre and as a Home Tutor once a week for both a Russian and an Armenian lad. She is also a Community Support Person, teaching social skills to people with an intellectual disability. The people she works with come from various ethnic backgrounds including Anglo-Australian, English, Latvian, Italian, Polish and Slavic.

Shantha and Sarala both migrated from India and met one another in Adelaide, where they became friends. They enjoyed their administration work at the Volunteer Centre of SA, where they met new people as they settled into their new community. Both were highly qualified in their professions and keen to obtain paid work. Shantha has found a part-time job and Sarala plans to do further study. However, their new experience of voluntary work enthused them both to continue to find time for it, and to pass the word on to others.

“Working in a multicultural community means all organisations are challenged to provide opportunities for workers to participate equally.”

Wendy Pusonjic was probably unique amongst the people with whom we spoke. She is Australian-born and with her husband, Nenad, works full-time for the Serbian community. Their efforts in building the Serbian nursing home are not their only commitments however, as each serves on other Boards and committees and Wendy represents the Serbian community at functions, such as Media Forums.

VOLUNTEERING: A MULTICULTURAL APPROACH

Working in a multicultural community means that all organisations, whether mainstream or ethno-specific, are challenged to provide opportunities for workers to participate equally.

How exciting it was to find examples of two such multicultural volunteer teams within ethnic community organisations. Philip Ng, from Chinese Welfare Services, actively recruits volunteers from different backgrounds to help with the work in the Chinese community. His experience in life in Singapore confirmed the benefits of multiculturalism and he believes the Chinese people here have much to gain from working closely with people of various backgrounds. Language can sometimes be a barrier, but his focus is on matching people's skills to the work that needs to be done. A mirror example of this was an elderly Chinese lady, who teaches Tai-Chi in the parklands to both Chinese and Australian students.

Maggie and Thuy became friends through their volunteer work at ICHAWA, where good community relations are modelled by the multicultural volunteer team. ICHAWA, like the majority of ethnic community organisations, depends on the support of its volunteers. Newly arrived people initially require help from those who speak their own language, but the Australian-born volunteers convey a welcoming attitude and provide emotional support to both staff and clients. People from backgrounds other than Vietnamese, support the organisation on its Board of management also.

Both of these organisations are convinced that volunteering provides opportunities for people to grow in their understanding of each other. Theirs is an example for others to follow.

IMAGES OF VOLUNTEERING IN AUSTRALIA

When people arrive in this new country, they bring with them their own values and ways of looking at the world. Here they are confronted with other world views. What images are conveyed and what impressions are gained, as they begin to become part of a new community?

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Many people with whom we spoke felt very positive about the voluntary work they noticed. Some, like Leokadia, were keen to become involved and to benefit from the opportunity to meet new people, practise their language skills and hopefully, be better prepared to apply for work.

Others, whilst valuing what they saw, noticed that there were differences from what they had experienced. Soontree felt that here, people had more time to contribute through volunteering. She noticed particularly the work with the elderly and thought that this was very necessary, as she noticed little family support in Australia, compared with her experience in Thailand. Anat agreed that people appeared to have more time available. She was impressed with the amount of work done, the organisation of volunteer effort and the freedom to choose, which contrasted with the pressure she had felt in Israel. Young, who is studying in the community services area, was surprised at the number and range of organisations that provided opportunities for people to volunteer. He was keen to learn more, so that he could introduce some new ideas when he returned to Korea.

In Vietnam, people considered the family as central and their only means of support. There were no social services, nor organised volunteer work, except through the churches and temples. Newly arrived people at ICHAWA, were amazed at the range of services available here. People in their community have discovered that many organisations here employ some paid staff who recruit, support and encourage volunteers. They believe that volunteering means that people can increase their skills, confidence and competence and gain satisfaction from doing something constructive. They were eager to become involved.

Some people were aware of the potential for exploitation of their volunteer effort. Due to the unwillingness of the government to provide adequate funding for interpreters, much of this work is carried out informally in the Spanish speaking communities, we were told. Lack of language skills puts people at a disadvantage, because to operate effectively in this society they need to articulate their needs. Therefore, they find it more difficult to initiate social action than they had in their own country. They believed that without

the volunteer effort carried out by their community, it would not be able to survive, and the people would be further disadvantaged.

Peter Lazarevich suggested that people born in Australia consider culture as separate from art, whereas those within ethnic community groups are motivated to continue their culture through artistic expression. Whilst recognising and participating in the culture of their new country, people who have migrated also need the opportunity to celebrate the culture of their homeland.

A common theme emerged through the stories of many people, particularly those like Mr Czerwinski, whose voluntary work is predominantly with the elderly. While they recognised that volunteering is a necessary and worthwhile activity, they felt that much of it goes unrecognised in the community. Some even felt that advantage was taken of their generous nature.

CHANGING PERCEPTIONS

For some people, the experience of volunteering in Australia has challenged their perceptions.

When Jacek arrived here with his parents from Poland, he believed that in a capitalist market people only worked for money. Since then, through his experiences in voluntary work, he can see the benefits both to himself and to others.

People who lived in Hungary after the second World War, when volunteering was "compulsory", developed an understanding that receiving something from someone else required a response. Their association believes that its work in Australia has set an example which challenges that view. People in their community are positively involved in volunteering now, and value it as a means to meet the needs of others.

Mrs Picheta agreed that people learn by example and in her association there has been a conscious effort to recruit younger people, to maintain the wonderful effort that has occurred over the years. She believed that the changes could also be noticed in Poland now, and she cited examples of people who were supporting the work of the church by organising soup kitchens for the poor.

Wendy and Nenad Pusonjic hoped that they were providing a model for other young people in the Serbian community, many of whom do not contribute to the community. Their work is an expression of their own personal philosophy of life and they are committed to it.

It appeared that it only needed a few people within an organisation to provide direction and vision for these changes to occur. These people have tapped the human will to survive and the desire to support others that often lies just below the surface.

FUTURE CONCERNS

In our discussions with volunteers from different ethnic backgrounds, there appeared to be some concern expressed about the future of volunteering and the impact that this would have on the on-going life of the communities themselves. It was mainly amongst the older people that we heard these issues.

Tim Ladas, the President of the Greek Orthodox Community Seniors Club at Port Adelaide, saw it as a matter of responsibility. Within the club it was difficult to get members to become actively involved in planning the club's activities. The responsibility appeared to rest mainly with him. This raises concern for the club's future when he may be unable to continue in this role.

Mr Czerwinski too, found that although volunteering was valued within the elderly Polish community and people were willing to help, they did not want to take on responsibility. Due to this, Mr Czerwinski remains the chairperson because no-one will accept the role. Even though there was a concern expressed by members about the on-going life of the club, they said it would close when Mr Czerwinski was no longer chairperson.

Others were concerned that the younger members of the community did not appear to have an interest, or the time, to continue their work. Younger people within the community did not feel an affinity with the past, often as a result of not having been encouraged to maintain their first language and as a consequence they were not committed to volunteering to the same extent within the community. These sentiments were shared by several people within the Maltese community, who believed it was because their large and active youth group had lapsed, that the clubs and organisations no longer attracted young people.

Harry Hirst, Chairperson of the Northern Region Ethnic Australia Aged Care Association, questioned the future of volunteering, as he could only get someone to help if they were paid. Mr Matisons, a fellow committee member, also found this within the Latvian community. His experience was that people would only do voluntary work if they received money. He also stated that: most of our volunteers who do the jobs are themselves ageing people. Sometimes I ask what will happen when I myself get old. Who is going to help me? The older people know that volunteer help is needed, but to get someone younger to do it is very hard. The hard part is that Latvians fall into 3 age groups; 60 plus, their children 35-40 and their children 0-20. Each of those groups has their own aims in life.

He believed that as the younger members of his community matured and realised that they too would need assistance, they may then become more involved in volunteering. At the moment the older Latvian community is becoming increasingly dependent on other organisations such as Domiciliary Care and Meals on Wheels.

“How vital it then becomes to recognise the contributions of people in the past and acknowledge their wisdom and vision.”

We were left with the picture that after many years of commitment to establishing, supporting and developing their communities, many people did not feel the freedom to say “enough”. Had their efforts created a situation where no one felt able to follow them, or were the changes beyond their control? Perhaps the younger people of their communities were active participants in the wider community. It is true to say that many Anglo-Australian clubs face the same issues and wonder about their future. How vital it then becomes to recognise the contributions of people in the past and acknowledge their wisdom and vision.

PULLING THE STRANDS TOGETHER

How new is the concept of volunteering really? During this project we have listened to many stories, been moved by many experiences and inspired by the depth and breadth of the human spirit. The danger is that we may be tempted to think that we have stumbled onto something new. But, rather, we have rediscovered that it is always people, responding to injustice, human need, concern for their environment, or in search of fulfilment, who initiate programs, motivate others and respond to need. What is new here, is that for the first time, in South Australia at least, we have pulled some strands together from people from many diverse backgrounds, and having done so, we must protect this fragile webbing of people and their experiences, learn from it, and make sure that its value and beauty is not lost. It is true that this represents the "tip of the iceberg". What more we have to discover in the future!

What are these strands that we have discovered? Certainly the shared recognition of the value of volunteering is one which has appeared over and over again. Despite oppressive situations and pressures to conform to government direction, human nature has prevailed, and people have come together voluntarily to respond through social action or community concern. This spirit has been the motivating force for many who have come to live in this country, to initiate their own support groups. Understandably suspicious as some will be of organised voluntary work, they have looked after their own in the first instance and striven to become an established group in the community, contributing through their self determination and sharing of new ideas and experiences. But can they? Are we really open to developing partnerships and building bridges with others whose backgrounds may be different from our own? Surely, volunteering together in areas we find mutually interesting, whether it be responding to a crisis or creating a new project, sharing companionship or preparing meals for the elderly, is a natural first step for us to consider. History proves it so – INSIDE OUT challenges us to take it.

Another strand we have discovered is that volunteering is so often a part of everyday life that it sometimes goes unnoticed. Or we refer to it by other names and so don't recognise it as something we share in common. But what is everyday life? For some it clearly has been portrayed as survival. Those stories have touched us deeply as we have perhaps had our "blinkers" taken away and have recognised the desperation that so many respond to daily, in striving for freedom and safety. For some, everyday life is something they strive for through migration. A chance to establish themselves and their families in a comparatively "normal" situation, away from persecution and fear. What opportunities are there for these people, who have clearly captured the spirit of volunteering, to participate in our community life and feel a sense of belonging? Surely the language of volunteering, extending and enhancing community life is universal?

“Our best hope lies in tapping the resourcefulness and skills that are reflected in these stories of the volunteers in our community.”

The desire to reciprocate emerged as yet another strand within these stories. Human nature is undeniably good, and people who have received friendship, financial or human support, often experience a need to respond. Many of the stories hinted at this truth. Whilst initially people may be motivated to continue their own culture through artistic expression, whether it be music, folklore, festivals or art itself, the sharing of these expressions of their spirit is often as important to their welfare as the provision of services. Are we missing the chance to experience these cultural gifts because we've been somewhat reticent to capture their expression of wanting to belong?

And so the final strand may be, in fact, that we have all had our perceptions challenged. That as these stories have unfolded and have been overlaid against the definition of volunteering in this country, we may all have been surprised as to what similarities there are, and that the only barriers are those of our own making. Or we may have been startled into recognising that some differences in perception have their roots in situations with which we have never been, nor want to be, confronted.

Wherever we find ourselves or our story amongst these strands, there is a clear message of concern for the future. It also is not new, but we would be foolish not to heed it. Volunteering is a dynamic force in society. It is the barometer of community relations. The strength of our future depends on the attention we give to growing in our knowledge and understanding of the volunteers who contribute to it and who are fulfilled by shared and positive experiences.

We are on the brink of a new century. Volunteers from the many diverse backgrounds that are part of the richness of this society will look forward to it with enthusiasm and commitment, as they grow in understanding of each other. But together we must provide the opportunities and allow our perceptions of the “traditional” volunteer to be challenged. We must recognise that people grow old and will not always be able to contribute to the same extent. Those who know the value of volunteering need to promote it widely and encourage others to share both the benefits and the work.

Our best hope lies in tapping the resourcefulness and skills that are reflected in these stories of the volunteers in our community. We must build bridges of shared knowledge and understanding, establish opportunities for people to participate, and always recognise that behind every “new” perception we may discover a shared history.

We live in a community and should not be alone. Common life makes strength.
Leszek Pilch (an English language student recently arrived from Poland).

LAST WORDS

INSIDE OUT captures the current perceptions of volunteering of people from many diverse backgrounds who have come to this country. It has answered some questions and also raised issues for future consideration, including:

- the need to continue to discover what people of all backgrounds understand about the concept of volunteering;
- the future of older established groups in the community;
- the promotion of cultural partnerships in volunteering.

These issues have considerable implications for all organisations that work with volunteers.

The listening and learning has been a two way process. Our goal is to encourage future dialogue and to capture the potential for new directions in volunteering.

Our partnerships began, fragile as a dew drop. Now they form little rivulets which, joining with other streams will turn into a river, growing stronger and stronger until they run into the sea.

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