

## Experiences and perceptions of **volunteering** in Indigenous and non-English speaking background communities

Yerra	
Ngarpartji	
Yungayungaworta	Voluntario
Work without any pay	Giving of yourself
Yi djoij	Boluntario
Working for God	Caring for others
Ser king	Charity
Helping out	Duty
Part of life	Working together
A way of giving	Paying back
Dharma	Giving of the heart
Voluntaire	Love for others
Neighbourliness	For the ancestors
Unthinking kindness	Voithao
Frei wille	Community caring
Giving back	Sharing good fortune
	Service to God
	The way to heaven
	Doing what's right

# **Experiences and perceptions of volunteering in Indigenous and non-English speaking background communities**

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A joint project of the Department of State Aboriginal Affairs, the South Australian  
Multicultural and Ethnic Affairs Commission, Volunteering SA, The Unaipon School  
(University of South Australia) and the Social Policy Research Group (University of  
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# GLOSSARY

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**ATSIC:** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission

**Aboriginal:** Peoples from communities Indigenous to the Australian mainland who identify with their Aboriginal heritage. Aboriginal peoples come from many Nations within Australia and this term is recognised as a general one for the Aboriginal population but in no way seeks to diminish the Nation, language group or clan connections of individual Aboriginal people cited in the Report.

**Indigenous:** This term is used in the Report to refer inclusively to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

**NESB:** Non English Speaking Background peoples. This term is used in the Report as the focus is on the culturally and linguistically diverse group of peoples identify for the purposes of the Study. The researchers acknowledge that not all NESB groups have been included and also that the term does not encompass the experiences of those peoples who have migrated to Australia from English speaking countries around the world.

**DOSAA:** Department of State Aboriginal Affairs

**CDEP:** Community Development Employment Program—a major funding program to Indigenous Australia whereby collective community based administration of unemployment benefits distributed to projects in the community that involve "work for the dole" participation of community members forms a major part of self determination and independence for communities.

**Social Capital:** The contribution to community well being that is generated and provided by the community enhancing activities of citizens in providing mutual support to one another—the "glue that binds society". This term has been coined to capture the value added contribution of community development activities and to indicate that whilst such community building contributions are not economically measured (eg in GDP of National budgets) there is a real dividend to society from civic participation and community contribution.

**Volunteering:** The contribution of one's time/labour/effort which is not remunerated and can take place in a structured, formal setting as part of a managed program or through the provision of informal, unstructured or unmanaged community contribution of support.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Contemporary discussion in Australian society which: encourages the development of mutual civic rights and responsibilities; is challenging the level of people's dependence on state support; is celebrating an International Year of recognition of the importance of Volunteering; and is highlighting the importance of 'social capital' to community functioning and civic life—is the ideal context within which to explore, learn from and pursue some of the outstanding models of community participation, volunteering and social capital exchange occurring in Indigenous and Non English Speaking Background communities today.

*Experiences and perceptions of volunteering in Indigenous and Non English Speaking Background Communities* extends knowledge of volunteering by examining in depth the experiences and perceptions of Indigenous people and those from NESB in relation to their voluntary activities and community effort—much of which has not been recognised, well supported, or valued—as it has often occurred outside the commonly acknowledged framework of volunteering. The study aims to add a cultural dimension to the discussions about volunteer effort and incorporate a more inclusive approach and diverse voices to the development of appropriate policies and supports for volunteer effort in South Australia.

The study is a collaboration between a research team from the University of South Australia and the South Australian Multicultural and Ethnic Affairs Commission, Volunteering SA. and the Department of State Aboriginal Affairs. The five-member research team included a NESB and an Indigenous researcher.

Previous research suggests that volunteer participation in our society is important and beneficial for a variety of reasons at the individual, community and state levels. However, volunteering, and the role of volunteers, is largely presented as unproblematic in public discussions and policy discourses. The concept of volunteering in Australia is generally consistent with, and interpreted within, a post-industrial western (Anglo Celtic) liberal social philosophy. As a consequence, the concept of volunteering—in fact the term volunteering itself, can take on an ethnocentric focus and an exclusive orientation in how volunteering is perceived and indeed supported in the public domain. The term volunteering has varying or little significance for Indigenous peoples and those from non-English speaking backgrounds. The paucity of research conducted to date on the impact of the ethnocentric focus of discussions about volunteering in Australia, might tend to suggest that Indigenous and Non English Speaking Background (herein NESB) peoples are under-represented in the volunteer sector. Yet the limited information available confirms that in fact the converse is more likely.

Data from the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (Altman and Taylor, 1996) following the 1994 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey, for example, suggests that in fact Indigenous Australians engaged in voluntary work more than non-Indigenous Australians (participation rate of 26.9% and 19% respectively for

those aged 15 and over engaged in voluntary work). The national survey included categories of informal or community maintenance activity as volunteering activity and described this area of cooperative food exchange as "*hunting and gathering*"<sup>1</sup>. If *hunting and gathering* informal voluntary activities are excluded from the definition of voluntary work the rate of Indigenous volunteering, revised to 20%, is still higher than for non-Indigenous Australians.

An important aspect of this study is that it has identified and supports the extensive voluntary contributions that Indigenous and Non English Speaking Background peoples make to both their own communities and to the broader community. There is clearly an enormous economic, social and civic dividend accruing to both the broad South Australian community—and to government itself—through the depth and breadth of Indigenous and non English Speaking Background peoples' voluntary contribution to social well being, community support and consultative structures. This benefit has, to date, been largely under resourced and often unrecognised in discussions about volunteering and volunteers.

This research identifies that informal volunteering—whereby people are providing community, family and individual support to others in an unstructured or unmanaged but nevertheless committed way, plays an equally important a role in building social capital as does formal, managed or more structured and recognisable forms of volunteering. The non-remunerated activity is no less important if it is carried out by an unmanaged volunteer outside of a formal organisational structure.

## Aims

This study examines Indigenous and NESB people's experiences and perceptions of volunteering and the voluntary sector. Specifically, the study recognises the need to conduct quality research which identifies issues and attitudes in relation to conceptions of volunteering, the nature of volunteer involvements, and supports for and barriers to volunteering in order to understand a) how volunteering can be promoted as an inclusive and enriching aspect of life, and b) how voluntary activity and community effort can be recognised, facilitated and supported.

## Research Method

The research method included a combination of interviews with key informants, focus groups and interviews with individual volunteers. The selection of key informants was undertaken with advice from SAMEAC and DOSAA. Focus groups and individual interviews were conducted with participants who were volunteering within and/or outside their own cultural group.

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<sup>1</sup> The term "*hunting and gathering*" may have offensive connotations for some people. These concerns may relate to past practices in "social Darwinian" based anthropological research, which tended to categorise economic and community development activities in ways which falsely implied a superior order of human developmental activities and privileged "white" industrialised societies. Such approaches are derogatory to Indigenous peoples and eschewed by this research. The term "*hunting and gathering*" is used here as it pertains to a particular empirical study which is based on respect for the economic and social capital which accrues from the cultural labour of Indigenous peoples towards the development and maintenance of community well being. The research team notes also that hunting and fishing rights are now an established and essential component of negotiations around self-determination and land rights issues in parts of Australia.



## Key Themes

The findings were organised and analysed around four key themes:

- i. The type and nature of volunteering undertaken within respondents' own cultural group and in the wider community including informal, unmanaged and unstructured volunteering activities which contribute to social well being and community functioning.
- ii. Definitions, conceptions of, motivation for, and attitude toward volunteering.
- iii. Supports for and barriers against volunteering within each cultural group.
- iv. Supports and barriers in the wider community, including government/non-government agencies.

While the range of expressions used to describe what may be termed 'volunteering' varied (over 37 words or phrases for volunteer effort were identified) the broad conception of activities revealed several key qualities. Volunteering activities encompassed helping, giving time and effort to others, and involved a sense of obligation, duty, or goodwill. For Indigenous communities words such as *Yerra*, *Ngapartji* and *Yungayungaworta*<sup>2</sup> were cited as encompassing notions of reciprocity and community obligation or *brother from behind* but there was no direct word that meant volunteer in the commonly used Western-centred sense of the term. There were common notions across the various NESB groups of reciprocity, religious significance, social obligations, social solidarity, and altruism which led to viewing helping others as not only a duty but a part of everyday life. Similarly for Indigenous communities there was the sense that reciprocity to one's kin and community was a not negotiable part of one's Aboriginality. Supporting, helping, sharing, giving of time and resources, cultural affirmation and taking care of country was a responsibility that was not viewed as special individualised effort but had a cultural dimension.

Some informants sought to explain the extensive reciprocity and community support exemplified in the interaction within and between many Indigenous peoples as deriving from the complex and sophisticated personal, familial and social obligations of kinship relations. However many respondents in this research identified as strongly with community obligations that were not necessarily kinship based, but linked with broader levels of affirmation and responsibility for community need, issues within a particular locality or community of interest. Many spoke of responsibility for Indigenous and/or NESB community, individual and family support based on shared experiences of perceived or actual exclusion or isolation from the dominant (Anglo Celtic) culture/non Indigenous services and organisations in the community. The sense of cultural reciprocity emerging from this study resonates with spiritual meaning, social and family connectedness. For Indigenous communities this has more recently been seen, by some, as part of the pan Aboriginal movement, in which many nations of Indigenous peoples in Australia extend kinship support and investment in human social capital, as a response to being oppressed in a society that has sought to divide and conquer. The history of the development of Aboriginal Affairs as a concerted focus of public and community activity and the involvement of Aboriginal peoples in the civic life of a multicultural Australia—from the 1967 referendum itself to the Olympics spectacle—is in itself a story of the struggle and efforts of many thousands of Indigenous (and non Indigenous) volunteers providing an extraordinary contribution to the development of a more inclusive, tolerant and racially plural Australia.

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<sup>2</sup> Our thanks go to Lewis O'Brien, Bill Edwards and Rob Amery for advice on the use of terms.

The infrastructure of the thousands of self determined and community managed health, social and educational agencies and programs throughout South Australia and the nation have been, and continue to be, underpinned by the voluntary efforts of Indigenous and NESB peoples. Many of these structures and community bodies provide a major contribution to government economic, cultural and social development as sources of consultative and advisory support.

According to ATSIC, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders have always had a strong commitment to community—the obligation to contribute for the benefit of the community as a whole is a strength of Indigenous cultures (ATSIC 1991, Lynn, Thorpe and Miles 1998, Edwards 1996). Indigenous people have developed ways of working that could be applied across the Australian community. For example, the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) Scheme has been operational since 1977 and provides a model for contemporary *Work for the Dole* schemes being adopted by mainstream government policies. It is claimed that Indigenous Australians, *by the very nature of their culture* (Edwards 1996, ATSIC 1999) are already meeting their obligation to community by participating in community building, cultural maintenance and family support activities, including: volunteer roles in community organisations; the CDEP scheme; income distribution among family members; caring for sick and elderly people; and reinforcing tradition and culture.

Similar observations are made with regard to the contribution of volunteer effort, social capital, advice and support to the broader community by NESB communities.

Standard definitions and measures of what constitutes volunteer activity (such as those used by ABS) are arguably culturally-biased and do not adequately account for the freely-given time and effort which, in a more inclusive framework of understanding would be regarded as volunteering. This study's findings revealed a wealth of voluntary activity and community effort within NESB and Indigenous groups, which has to date, been largely unreported as much of it falls outside the standard parameters. A definition of volunteering which was broader in scope could identify the major contribution informal, unmanaged and unstructured volunteering makes to the public good. Many respondents in this study indicated they did the same type of work as formal "volunteers" connected to a "structured" program—but it wasn't/isn't counted—and therefore underestimates or fails to recognise and adequately celebrate the depth and breadth of NESB and Indigenous community contributions to social life. Volunteer activity is no less important and no less an economic and social contribution whether taking place within a formal organisational setting or an informal community context. Respondents indicated that they faced considerable barriers to their volunteering—both within their own groups and in the wider community. These barriers were both structural and attitudinal. That is, there were significant problems associated with issues such as culturally/linguistically-appropriate training and support for volunteers, feelings of exclusion due to language difficulties and/or cultural difference, and a generalised perception that their efforts are largely unrecognised and unappreciated—particularly in terms of formal recognition.

Respondents identified a number of critical issues around supports and barriers. Whilst the common perception was that few support mechanisms exist, respondents cited many barriers which made their voluntary activity and community effort difficult. A common issue for both NESB and Indigenous respondents was a sense of the cultural exclusivity of formal volunteer arrangements. Some cited racism as an issue. The most pressing barriers cited by the NESB community included: communication (for example in

accessing culturally/linguistically appropriate information/training, and availability of translators/interpreters); financial costs—both at the individual and organisational level (for example reimbursement of expenses and maintaining infrastructure); and relationships with government departments and other organisations which respondents felt could do more to assist them (for example lack of cross-cultural workers, and difficulties in complying with inflexible and restrictive bureaucratic processes). In addition, at an individual level, people from NESB were often reticent to volunteer in the wider community due to language difficulties and perceptions regarding non-acceptance of their cultural difference.

Similarly Indigenous volunteers reported both structural and attitudinal inhibitions to participation through lack of information about volunteer supports or opportunities; the lack of culturally/linguistically appropriate information/training; financial costs—both at the individual and organisational level (for example reimbursement of expenses, maintaining infrastructure, assistance with training costs); and relationships with government departments and other organisations which respondents felt could do more to assist them (for example difficulties in complying with inflexible and restrictive bureaucratic processes such as policies related to the Community Employment Development program (CDEP)); Centrelink restrictions; the nature of police checks; and access to Community Service order placements in a culturally sensitive environment). At the individual level, Indigenous respondents spoke of racism and feeling excluded from recognition for their volunteer efforts in the wider community as barriers to participation outside of community contexts. Some also spoke of the need to support one's own first given the depth of Indigenous disadvantage and the enormous problems facing communities couples with the perceived lack of support from many mainstream volunteer agencies for Indigenous disadvantage and cultural difference.

For Indigenous community respondents there was a perception that the depth and breadth of Indigenous contribution to non-Indigenous organisations through cultural volunteering, land maintenance and advice to organisations, self help advisory and support structures to assist the better delivery of mainstream services and so on, was not widely acknowledged or appreciated. In addition the level of self help and community well being sustained by Indigenous people volunteering in Indigenous organisations, on Boards, committees, in schools, the justice system and for the young, the elderly and those needing transport or other forms of material assistance was extensive, yet not well supported by mainstream volunteer structures. The further away from urban settings the more reliant on volunteer effort Indigenous communities appeared to be and yet a clear barrier was a lack of coverage by volunteer support services to country areas.

The research identified that cultural factors play a significant part in the valuing of, and attitudes towards, volunteering. Conceptions of what constitutes volunteering and its social significance are highly influenced by structures, values and norms present in the cultural milieu. The findings also indicated that social responsibilities, duties, reciprocity and expectations were the key drivers of social cohesion and community development within many of the Indigenous and NESB groups and individuals surveyed.

The research indicates that within NESB and Indigenous communities there is an enormous amount of what, from an ESB/non Indigenous perspective, would be termed volunteering. Cultural and linguistic differences mean much of that activity is generally not acknowledged, fails to attract both material support and wider recognition, is not formalised and operates within the commonly-accepted frames of reference particular to that community. It is of vital importance that the concept of volunteering be extended to

encompass different interpretations of what it means to give of one's time and effort to others, in order to appreciate the experiences of those who do so outside of mainstream organisations and dominant paradigms. A broader conception of volunteering and community effort will provide important recognition and understanding of how social capital is actually formed in a contemporary multicultural Australian society in which productive diversity and reconciliation are firmly on the public agenda. Volunteering and community effort, in a more supportive and inclusive community environment may well prove to be the vehicle through which the ideals of reconciliation and the achievement of a socially diverse, multicultural society may flourish. The challenge now remains for governments, mainstream community organisations and Indigenous and NESB communities to foster productive links, share resources, and cooperate to achieve this promise.

# INTRODUCTION

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Previous research suggests that volunteer participation in our society is important and beneficial for a variety of reasons at the individual, community and state levels. Volunteering, and the role of volunteers, is largely presented as unproblematic in public discussions and policy discourses. Yet it is clear that the social and ideological construction of the concept of volunteering in Australia presupposes particular forms of community organisation, family formation, and bonds of personal and social mutual reciprocity consistent with western liberal socio-political philosophy. As a consequence of this, in Australia, the concept of volunteering—in fact the term volunteering itself, has varying significance to Indigenous peoples and those from non-English speaking backgrounds (herein NESB). Current volunteering arrangements may be culturally inappropriate (even irrelevant) for certain Indigenous and NESB peoples. That is, cultural attributes and alternative community and familial organisation may generate different requirements and obligations for social support (for example extended familial commitments and expectations). These alternative formations of social support often escape detection by policy makers and in social recordings (for example, the Australian Bureau of Statistics) and are therefore often not recognised. Notwithstanding this, it is also apparent that other factors (external to Indigenous and NESB peoples) may act as barriers or supports for Indigenous and NESB peoples' involvement in volunteering.

Given the importance of volunteering, it is timely to investigate the participation of Indigenous and NESB peoples in volunteering and to formulate policy recommendations that will encourage, support and recognise more culturally diverse experiences of volunteering in the future. It is hoped that the findings of this research will provide the basis for exploring and interpreting the perceptions and experiences of particular respected individuals in the Indigenous and NESB communities as a basis for more sensitive policy and program approaches.

This research is highly significant across separate, but increasingly interconnected social and cultural dimensions, which, as argued by Kerr and Savelsberg (1997a, 1997b) can be broadly categorised as individual, community and state. From the perspective of the individual, volunteering in Australia provides the opportunity to fulfil a variety of roles and needs—for example the need to contribute in a positive way to the community, to find companionship, to enhance feelings of self-worth, or to develop networks and job skills. From the community perspective, not only would much of community life be diminished without the effort and contribution which volunteers make, but so too would the essential bonds of social capital—without which, as argued by Cox (1995), the very nature of relationships between individuals is weakened. For society in general—and from the perspective of the state in particular—the work of volunteers is becoming increasingly necessary on purely pragmatic grounds to provide or enhance services (such as health, education, and the care of the young, old, and disabled), which are an integral part of social life. Commentators such as Pearson (2000) Dodson (1993) and O'Donoghue (1998) have also commented on the need for a greater recognition of the independent

contribution of Indigenous reciprocity, self-determination and mutual responsibility to both Indigenous and the wider non Indigenous community.

This pragmatic consideration is heightened when consideration is given to two emerging trends. Firstly, demographic and social factors indicate growing numbers of people who, for a variety of reasons, seek welfare and community assistance—for example, an ageing population potentially in need of increasing levels of community and welfare support (Young 1990), and greater numbers of people suffering distress and disadvantage occasioned by factors including unemployment, poverty, family breakdown, and substance abuse. Secondly, changes in welfare delivery are seen in the trend toward a marketised model which depends to a large extent on notions of community, self help and social capital for its viability (Kerr and Savelsberg 1999). This changing form of service delivery is evidenced by a growing emphasis on community in terms of policy formation. In short, the state needs volunteers across a wide range of social and welfare service delivery, communities need volunteers to not only deliver services but also to facilitate the largely intangible but very necessary social capital which, as Cox (1995) claims is the 'glue' which binds society together—and individuals need the benefits of volunteering for a host of personal and broader social reasons.

Scarce research conducted to date appears to suggest that Indigenous Australians and people from non-English speaking backgrounds are under-represented in the volunteer sector. Research conducted by the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research following the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey (1994) however, provides data to show that the contrary is occurring and that in fact Indigenous Australians are engaged in voluntary work more than non Indigenous Australians (cited in Altman and Taylor 1996).

The significant community contribution and accumulation of social capital in Indigenous and NESB communities is not well supported publicly and is largely undervalued and unrecognised. This is particularly worrying for several reasons. Firstly, if, as previous research has demonstrated, there are personal gains which enhance individual holistic well-being, plus broader gains in terms of developing social capital and strengthening communities to be had via volunteer involvement (Cox 1997, Kerr and Savelsberg 1997b), then it may be that those groups of people who do not volunteer or are not recognised for their volunteering are not able to access, and hence not benefit, from those gains. Secondly, if as demographic and social trends indicate, there are growing numbers of people from Indigenous and NESB backgrounds who are in need of community support via the volunteer sector, the corollary of such trends is that volunteers who are socially and culturally aligned with those people—that is, volunteers from within these groups—are needed. Thirdly, the current emphasis by the state on utilising the local knowledge, facilities and resources of communities to assist in the delivery of welfare and social services relies on volunteers from all sectors—including Indigenous people and those from NESB backgrounds.

This research is significant and timely for two major reasons. Firstly, it extends knowledge of volunteering outside of English-speaking background communities by examining in depth the experience and perceptions of Indigenous people and those from non-English speaking backgrounds in terms of their voluntary activities and community effort. Secondly, it represents genuine collaboration between academics at the University of South Australia (from the Unaipon School, College of Indigenous

Education and Research and the School of Social Work and Social Policy) and the Department of State Aboriginal Affairs, the South Australian Multicultural and Ethnic Affairs Commission and Volunteering S.A. Inc.. All partners have provided financial and substantial in-kind support. This collaboration has afforded the opportunity to pool significant areas of experience and expertise. We take this opportunity to acknowledge this and thank the partners for the invaluable support and collaboration provided.

It should be noted at the outset that the research is intended as a small-scale pilot study in an area hitherto significantly under-investigated. The findings are intended as an introduction which identifies key issues and themes and, rather than providing conclusive evidence. Hence they should be regarded as opening up the field of discussion in what is an extremely pertinent area and signalling the way forward for future studies.

### Socio Political Context

The processes of assimilation, cultural destruction and the deliberately race-based exclusionary practices of state policies post the invasion of the Australian continent have been consistently resisted by the extraordinary voluntary efforts of Indigenous peoples. Concerted voluntary efforts to counter, combat, organise and support community and cultural integrity and maintain family connectedness and community well being in the face of a rapid and wholesale destruction of cultures and communities is nothing short of inspirational.

Periods of violence, resistance and suppression of the traditional Indigenous custodians of land underpinned by notions of Terra Nullius rendered Indigenous peoples invisible and rights to nation status, treaty or citizenship ignored for a major part of the emerging nation's early colonial history. With Federation came new uniform citizenship rights for some—and uniform exclusions for others determined explicitly on the grounds of race and ethnicity. The 1967 Referendum which was overwhelmingly supported by the Australian community gave the Commonwealth positive powers regarding Indigenous issues and paved the way for more inclusive policy approaches; the development of self-determination as the rationale in Aboriginal Affairs administration; and the movement towards land rights and self governance. The MABO decision ignited public debate regarding Native Title and deconstructed the myth of Terra Nullius which had for so long compromised non-Indigenous Australia's approach to Indigenous economic and social liberation.

Subsequent Wik determinations and the movement towards 'reconciliation' as the dominant government policy context, have heralded the current debates about removing reliance on the 'shackles of welfare' towards full economic, social and civic participation. Debates regarding the efficacy of Treaty agreements and recompense for the sorry aspects of Australia's past and contemporary race relations policies feature prominently in current public debates.

The emergence of Indigenous specific agencies, services and programs of self-management and self-determination have been realised only through the voluntary efforts of many thousands of Indigenous and non Indigenous Australians. Today the movement for Australian Reconciliation, the National Aboriginal and Islander Day of Celebrations (NAIDOC), the many agencies and community councils, educational, youth, health and social advisory structures that feature so prominently in

Aboriginal Affairs are underpinned entirely by voluntary effort. Whilst many Aboriginal affairs policy and management positions have now been appropriately professionalised and funded, it is worthy of noting that these positions were initiated in many cases by voluntary work effort and continue to be supported by largely voluntary boards, committees and support teams.

This study presents a first attempt to begin to map, make visible and theorise the enormous contribution to social capital provided by Indigenous Australians within communities and to the broader community context. The history of exclusion based on race and ethnicity which must be included in any understanding of the context of Aboriginal Affairs in contemporary Australia also can be seen to apply to Australia's engagement with people from non English Speaking Backgrounds.

Whilst ironically all of Australia's contemporary history is based upon the arrival of peoples from overseas, the periods of deliberative immigration, particularly from non-British cultures, have been marked by different and distinct policy motivations and have led to quite distinct periods of different social policy responses to new arrivals and new settlers. From the race based exclusion of Chinese and 'coloured' labour from the gold fields to the White Australia policy, the engagement of non-English background people's in the emerging Australian nation state has always been closely linked to views about the balance between economic benefit—or perceived disbenefit—accruing to Anglo Australians by non British migration.

Post World War II the concerted encouragement of particularly European migration to Australia to help build National infrastructure—'to populate or perish'—created new policy dilemmas regarding the integration of non English Speaking Background peoples within the broader community context. European immigration was clearly seen to be to the economic advantage of the (non-Indigenous) Anglo-Australian state but integration of the NESB migrants was similarly viewed as important to maintaining the dominance of British mores in the cultural ascendancy of a predominately Anglo-centric state.

Whilst Australia, prior to as well as post invasion, has always been multicultural and multi racial, the dominant cultural discourses of white, British, Anglo/Celtic, Anglo/Saxon have privileged the notion of a non-Indigenous, English speaking normative 'mainstream'. Post World War II the Australian state deliberately encouraged the migration not only of British but also Southern and Northern European peoples, peoples from the Balkan states, India and more recently South East Asia, Malaysian and Indonesia. The arrival of these peoples has not been reflected in dominant public discourses, which continue to reproduce concepts of an homogenous monocultural mainstream.

Furthermore, the differing perceptions of second generation NESB peoples from those of new arrivals (including refugees) provides interesting insights into the ways in which felt or real exclusion from ethnocentric services in the mainstream, continues to underpin the necessity for the enormous voluntary effort of NESB communities to help each other and themselves. Maintenance of culture and language through relevant and culturally specific services, ensuring that community support is offered in culturally appropriate and preferred ways.



## Research Aims

This study examines Indigenous and NESB people's experiences and perceptions of volunteering and the voluntary sector. Specifically, the study recognises the need to conduct research which identifies: (i) issues and attitudes in relation to conceptions of volunteering, (ii) the nature of volunteer involvements, and (iii) supports for and barriers to volunteering in order to understand (a) how volunteering can be promoted as an inclusive and enriching aspect of life, and (b) how voluntary activity and community effort can be recognised, facilitated and supported. Hence, the aims of this research are:

- i. To examine the experiences and perceptions of Indigenous and NESB people regarding volunteering, with special reference to conceptions of volunteerism, supports and barriers to participation, and the nature and range of volunteer activities currently undertaken by these groups.
- ii. To assess the role of volunteerism in selected Indigenous and NESB communities, and the extent to which (or if) current social policies and welfare reforms enhance or detract from volunteer participation by these groups.

## Research Method

Given the complexity of issues impacting on volunteers and volunteering and the research team's desire to obtain as broad a perspective as possible on the diversity and significance of volunteering for NESB and Indigenous communities, the research was undertaken using multiple methods of data collection—each of which was discrete, but progressively informed subsequent collection of data. This approach facilitated a constantly reflexive research environment, enabling issues to emerge and be incorporated as the study progressed, whilst also promoting integration and synthesis of the data obtained.

The three strategies for data collection were:

- i. Interviews with key informants who were recognised leaders in their community (10 from NESB and 10 from the Indigenous communities).
- ii. Focus groups (10 NESB communities and 3 from Indigenous communities)
- iii. Interviews with volunteers from NESB and Indigenous communities actively involved in volunteer work (40 NESB and 22 Indigenous persons).

A total of thirty-five NESB groups and at least nine Indigenous cultural groups were represented in the project. A summary of the selection criteria for interviews and focus groups along with copies of the instruments used is provided in Appendix A. Our objective was to obtain data that would provide an overview of how community leaders interpreted contemporary issues and policies within the wider social and political context as well as reflecting the perspectives of NESB and Indigenous volunteers themselves. The use of multiple data gathering strategies enabled the generation of common themes as well as diversity and contrasts—ensuring that, as far as possible, a range of voices were heard describing the experiences and perceptions of volunteering in NESB and Indigenous communities.

## Ethical and other considerations

There were several pragmatic considerations occasioned by the study's relatively small size (and budget), which directed and limited its scope. This meant that, for the NESB component it was not possible to interview members of NESB communities in

regional or rural areas—although to include them would have been desirable. For the Indigenous research component of the study one focus group was held in the metropolitan area, one in Murray Bridge and one in Port Augusta. The decision to include select regional locations was made in recognition of the dispersed nature of Indigenous peoples across the state. The extensive social capital and volunteer effort in rural and remote areas, require separate dedicated research.

The Australian National Health and Medical Research Council (NH&MRC) has produced the (still current) *Guidelines on Ethical Matters in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research* and within South Australia the Aboriginal Research Institute of the College of Indigenous Education and Research of the University of South Australia has developed a set of Aboriginal research protocols for any research conducted that has an Indigenous component. This research project has stringently met the standards required of these ethical protocols and in addition the involvement of Department of State Aboriginal Affairs as a partner in the collaborative project has ensured that additional intellectual property and confidentiality procedures have been incorporated. The research methodology has been discussed with DOSAA during scheduled Reference Group meetings at key stages of the research. As an *action research project* this research clearly aims to strengthen the links between Aboriginal communities, researchers, policy development and service delivery.

As Dr Lowitja O'Donoghue (1998) has said:

*...Aboriginal peoples ...have been amongst the most studied and researched group in the world ... few if any tangible benefits have flowed to our people, as the research papers and academic accolades have stacked up. Researchers have, by and large, defined the problems and sought solutions that they have seen as the correct 'scientific' way to go.*

In Australia, debate about the ethics of undertaking Indigenous research is by no means new (Humphery 2000). Since at least the 1970s critics have expressed concern and anger about western research practice within a range of disciplinary areas. Indigenous critics in particular have focused on the conceptual, methodological and political shortcomings of western forms of inquiry (Briscoe 1978; Langton 1981a, 1981b; Langford 1983; Anderson 1996; Brady 1999).

The research team was committed to ethical and appropriate research practice, which respected the cultural uniqueness and diversity of participants, the sensitivity of the information provided and the need to accurately report. An Indigenous and a NESB researcher were involved in activities at all times. In addition a special aspect of the relationship between the partners is a documented agreement that no aspect of the Indigenous research would be accessed or cited without the joint consent of DOSAA and The Unaipon School, nor would the composite research material be cited without the consent of all of the partners.

Finally, for reasons of sensitivity and confidentiality, individual cultural groups have not been identified in the material that follows. Given its acknowledged limitations, the study is presented as a rich and highly informative reflection on volunteering from the perspective of those people from Indigenous and NESB to whom we spoke.

# LITERATURE REVIEW

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Definitions of volunteering have long been open to debate in Anglo-Celtic cultures (Sheier 1980; Sheard 1986; Baldock 1988; Noble 1991, 2000; Volunteering SA 1999). In its early surveys of voluntary work, the ABS (1989 & 1995) defined volunteers as *individuals who freely contribute their services without remuneration (other than reimbursement of expenses occurred while working) to a variety of community activities. These voluntary services can be provided through organisations and/or outside of organisations (1989 p.16).*

Volunteers outside of organisations provide *regular voluntary services to neighbours, friends or other persons (who were not members of their own family) (1989 p.16).*

Noble (1991) sees volunteering as having three essential elements: Volunteering "provides a service to the community, is done of one's own free will and is done without monetary reward" (1991 p. 4). In their publication *Volunteering in Australia* (1996) the Australian Council of Social Service adopts an identical definition.

In their *Volunteering Is For All (Multicultural)* project (VIFA 1992), the Volunteer Centre of South Australia acknowledged that it had a predominantly Anglo-Celtic perspective of volunteering and that there was a need to speak with people of different cultural backgrounds about their individual experiences and perceptions of volunteering.

Martin (1999) discusses the mainstream concept of volunteering and its culturally constructed underpinnings that may not be shared by people from other cultures. She describes a Community Refugee Support Project run by the Fremantle Migrant Resource Centre where trained volunteers (interestingly their ethnicity is not identified) are linked with newly arrived refugees assessed to be at risk of social isolation. The program found that the recipients of the volunteers' efforts had difficulty understanding why someone would want to help them. Some were unfamiliar with the concept of government-provided social services. In some languages the interpreters could not find a translation of the term volunteer. In other cultures the term volunteer had negative connotations of being associated with propaganda or spies. The refugees were reluctant to disclose anything that may be used against them.

Vangelista (1999) stresses how important it is to be aware of the dominant conceptual frameworks of a culture and their influence on how people perceive their responsibilities. Thus, whether a culture values individualism more than collectivism, or *vice versa*, will influence their perceptions of volunteering. She reports on the Vietnamese *Good Beginnings* National Parenting Project which highlighted two relevant issues: firstly that some people were not familiar with the concept of volunteering, and secondly, that the notion of confidentiality was new for some.

A discussion paper produced by Volunteering SA (1999) aimed to achieve a definition of volunteering which reflects current social and political trends and the

diversity and dynamism that characterises volunteering. The paper notes that people can be motivated to volunteer for many different reasons, ranging from to gain experience, be involved, satisfy Centrelink requirements, and to help others (1999 p. 22). The paper attempts to identify the core aspects of volunteering, taking into account recent changes in public policy and corporate behaviour, and the privatisation of public services. The suggestion is made in the paper that it is useful to consider "whether a program actually enables, encourages or enforces volunteering" (1999 p.14) and indicates that it may be more useful to consider the individual's level of choice or willingness, rather than the notion of free-will. The paper proposes four key principles by which volunteering should be guided, namely:

- Individual choice
- Access for all: "Individuals are given fair and equitable access to volunteering opportunities regardless of age, gender, race, or socioeconomic background. This may even extend to positive forms of discrimination to ensure social inclusion for some groups."
- Informed consent
- Best Practice (Volunteering SA 1999, p.22).

Some material from overseas on different cultural experiences and perceptions of volunteering is relevant. For example, Joseph (1995) looks at the distinctive legacies of self-help and charitable traditions of Native Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans and Latinos and how these contribute to a larger vision of the American community and of volunteering.

Smith (1993) and Gaskin & Smith (1995) explore basic questions about volunteering including how it is defined, in a large number of European countries, and conclude that each country's volunteering has a special character resulting from the unique interplay of social, economic, political and cultural factors.

The literature therefore does suggest that current definitions of volunteering have limitations—as do mainstream conceptions of volunteering itself. However, as research to date has not adequately addressed the cultural and linguistic complexities of volunteering from perspectives other than that of ESB or non-Indigenous people, proposals already suggested in the literature regarding more inclusive definitions do not fully encompass the diversity of perceptions and experience of people from NESB or Indigenous communities.

## Literature Review – Indigenous

*You've gotta get back to this philosophy [Yurebilla—'twoness']. This is what it is all about. The group is far more important than the individual. People have been sold a terrible statement that an individual can do as they like. (Kurna elder, Lewis O'Brien as cited in McBride 2000: 5)*

### Indigenous models of community wellbeing

This research acknowledges that any attempts to generalise the cultural perspectives of people is problematic. Terms such as *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders* and *Indigenous peoples* may serve to generalise experiences inappropriately and mask the

explication of the rich diversity of cultures, languages and social and economic contexts of many nations and communities across Australia.

According to ATSIC, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders have always had a strong commitment to community—the obligation to contribute for the benefit of the community as a whole is a strength of Indigenous cultures (ATSIC 1991; Lynn, Thorpe and Miles 1998; Edwards 1996). Indigenous people have developed ways of working that could be applied across the Australian community. For example, the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) Scheme has been operational since 1977 and provides a model for contemporary *Work for the Dole* schemes being adopted by mainstream government policies. It is claimed that Indigenous Australians, *by the very nature of their culture* (Edwards, 1996; ATSIC 1999) are already meeting their obligation to community by participating in community building, cultural maintenance and family support activities, including: volunteer roles in community organisations; the CDEP scheme; income distribution among family members; caring for sick and elderly people—rather than placement in nursing homes; and reinforcing tradition and culture.

The diversity of circumstances facing Indigenous Australians differs markedly to that of non-Indigenous Australians. A strong link to place, culture, land and family remain important day to day considerations for Indigenous peoples, and in combination with acute examples of social, economic and health disadvantage have created a population distribution skewed towards particular regions and localities often poorly serviced by 'mainstream' community infrastructure. Around 70% of Indigenous people live outside of the major urban centres. Job markets and training opportunities are not readily available in rural and remote areas and concepts of reciprocity or informal kinship and community support—equivalent to strong demonstrations of the non-Indigenous nomenclature of *social capital* and *mutual obligation*—are often the only means for maintaining community functioning.

A study by James Cook University into the construction of helping in Indigenous community and cultural contexts (Lynn, Thorpe and Miles 1998) indicated the disjunction between the Western liberal based notions of helping and the experience of Indigenous peoples. The privileging of dominant cultural perceptions of helping, giving time and support or indeed volunteering have resulted in ignorance about and the devaluing or discounting of cultural ways of contributing to community wellbeing. There is emerging a growing body of literature (Midgley 1981; NSW Ethnic Affairs Commission 1986; Pease 1990), cited elsewhere in this chapter, which has begun to challenge much of the normative, and Western centred focus of human services and volunteering literature. Little however has been documented about the rich experiences of social capital accumulation, distribution and exchange in Aboriginal Australia. The dynamic process of continual renewal reflects as Rowse (1993, p.57) identifies "...the fluid, negotiable and transitory quality of corporate life among Aboriginal peoples".

NATSIS survey work (Altman and Taylor, 1996) provides important indicators of the enormous contribution being made by Aboriginal volunteers to the development, maintenance and cohesion of both communities and community agencies. This has particular significance given the stark indicators of disadvantage in Indigenous Australia—some of which are outlined below. Acknowledgement and understanding of the level of disadvantage faced by Aboriginal people is important

for understanding the multiplicity of ways in which volunteer efforts sustain communities.

### Socio-economic disadvantage

As at 30 June 1996, it was estimated that there were some 386 000 Indigenous Australians (ABS 1998b). This figure was projected to increase to somewhere between 411 000 and 453 000 in 1999. South Australia at this time was estimated to have some 22,051 Indigenous people (1.5% of the SA population), which represented some 5.7% of the Indigenous population nation wide. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population grew at nearly twice the rate of the total population between 1991 and 1996 (ABS 1998a, 1999a). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a younger age profile than other Australians with a median age of 20 years compared to 34 years for all Australians. Indigenous families were, on average, larger than other families recorded in the 1996 Census. This was particularly apparent with respect to the number of children, with 13% of Indigenous families having four or more children in comparison to 5% of other families (ABS 1998b).

Young people under 15 account for 40% of the Indigenous population—nearly double the proportion in the total population (ABS 1999a). Youth issues such as education and the transition to work therefore assume a relatively higher profile. Sole parent families accounted for 30% of Indigenous families, twice the proportion of other families (14%). Indigenous couple families were much less likely to be without children (27% of couple families) than other families where 41 per cent of couple families had no children resident (ABS 1998b).

ATSIIC sponsored research has provided evidence of the disparity between Indigenous Australians and the total Australian population: An unemployment rate of 26% compared to 8.0%; a labour force participation rate of 52.7% compared to 62%; a full-time employment / population ratio of 24% compared to 40%; an average income level for adults of \$14 000 compared to \$20 000; and an average annual rate of population growth of around 2.3%.

For the 1991 to 1996 period, estimated life expectancy for Indigenous males was 18 years less than for all Australian males and 19 years less for Indigenous females than for all Australian females. Indigenous male life expectancy is comparable to that for males in Lesotho, Western Sahara and Bolivia. Indigenous female life expectancy is comparable to that for females in Iraq, Western Sahara, Bolivia and Pakistan (AIHW 1999 p.134). In the 1995–97 period, for jurisdictions where data is available (Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory), three-quarters of deaths among Indigenous males and two-thirds of deaths among Indigenous females occurred before the age of 65. In contrast, three-quarters of deaths among non-Indigenous males and eight in ten deaths among non-Indigenous females occurred after the age of 65 (ABS & AIHW 1999, p.130).

Indigenous Australians were more likely to be hospitalised for and to die from mental disorders such as depression, psychosis, self-harm and substance misuse.

Mental health problems should be seen in the context of separation from family, poverty, discrimination and racism (ABS & AIHW 1999:103– 04).<sup>3</sup>

Just over twice as many Indigenous people, compared to the total population, live in small urban centres. By contrast less than half as many Indigenous people live in major urban areas compared to the total population (ABS 1999a). Indigenous households accounted for 31% of all households living in improvised dwellings (ABS 1998b). Improvised dwellings can be used as a rough proxy for homelessness.

It is not surprising, given poor educational and employment outcomes for Indigenous Australians that personal income levels are also far below those recorded for non-Indigenous Australians. In 1996, the median weekly income for Indigenous people was just under three-quarters of the median income for all Australians (ABS 1998b). Not surprisingly, family income was also low with the median weekly income some \$234 lower than that for other families (ABS 1998b). Analysis of the occupational segmentation of the labour market between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians highlights poor occupational status for Indigenous people with a clustering in low paid positions in predominantly community service or government agencies (Taylor and Liu 1996). Vellekoop-Baldcock (1990, pp.35, 82) argue that the duality of the labour market may be paralleled in the voluntary work market—“namely Indigenous and minority ethnic groups may be segregated out of mainstream voluntary work opportunities and concentrated in their own community organisations”.

Analysis of data from the 1994 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey found that the single most important predictor of employment for Indigenous Australians was holding a post-school qualification (ABS & CAEPR 1996). Indigenous Australians were less likely to be in full-time education than other Australians. At age 15, 73.7% of Indigenous people were attending an educational institution full-time compared to 91.5% of all persons. Of those Indigenous Australians employed, 14.9% were employed in ATSIC's Community Development Employment Scheme. Employed Indigenous people were nearly three times as likely to be working as labourers and related workers as non-Indigenous people and almost half as likely to be employed as managers and administrators or in professional occupations (ABS 1998b). Given the higher growth rates and the younger age structure of the Indigenous population demand for jobs will, in the future, be higher than for non-Indigenous Australians.

### Conceptualising volunteer effort

The distinction between the public (paid) and private (unpaid) domains of work in post-colonial, post-industrial societies and the generation of contemporary discourses about the nature of volunteering (contributing unpaid labour for public as against private consumption) are largely culturally constructed and situated within the norms and values of a liberal capitalist society.

The Indigenous domain today, embodies the legacy—realised in contemporary experience as acute disadvantage in health, economic, social and educational status

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<sup>3</sup> Research by Professor Fran Baum has identified the positive correlation between strong voluntary contributions to community well being/social cohesion and mental health strength. The Grannies Group (see Appendix B) and others like it may well serve important roles in the health and well being of community members under stress or experiencing grief, loss and trauma.

of two hundred years of occupation, invasion, repression of dissent and dispossession of land, culture and economic activity. Simultaneously and deliberately the colonial powers and later national state apparatus served to structurally exclude Indigenous Australians from any substantial engagement in the economic and industrial life of the emerging nation state. Similarly there was no sustained recognition or respect for, or learning from, the complex cultural, economic and social practices of the existing populations of Australia.

In considering volunteering within the Indigenous domain therefore it is important to consider:

- The historically disadvantaged position created for Aboriginal Australians in relation to the paid/unpaid work dichotomy;
- Reciprocity and kinship obligations which may vary depending on the community and context—but cannot be generalised to all Indigenous cultures and situations;
- The complexity of poverty and educational disadvantage, and their combined effect on disproportionately high levels of incarceration, suicide, poor health, high levels of unemployment and early mortality; and
- The outstanding contributions of Indigenous communities to the development of knowledge in technology, medicine, nutrition, science, environmental management practices, cultural tourism, arts and sports.

The notion of social capital exemplified in the amount of unpaid productive contribution to the social and community good—from activism to extended family support and care, may not translate easily to a normative and post-industrial Western perception of volunteering. Western concepts of volunteering imply some sense of choice and fulfilment—whereas the reality for many Indigenous Australians is that volunteer effort is a key aspect of racial and cultural survival, self-determination and mutual responsibility.

The conceptualisation of volunteering within the Indigenous domain is usefully situated in the discourses of colonisation and resistance, social exclusion and social struggle. Social activism, economic need and Cox's concept of social glue arguably all contribute to the pattern of volunteering in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

There is a body of evidence to suggest that human services literature is increasingly preoccupied with the transitions *from rational markets to civil societies* (Cox 1995; Giddens 1998; Winter 2000). There is growing attention to the sustainability of community networks and social services in Australia (Hughes, Bellamy and Black 1998). The fragility of civil society in Australia has been highlighted by falling levels of trust, of individuals and of institutions (Hughes, Bellamy and Black 1998), and by a change in the participation patterns and motivation for voluntary work (Lyons and Fabiansson 1998; Kerr and Savelsberg 1999).

It is perhaps ironic given the centrality of reciprocity and community interdependence for many thousands of years in the political economy, social and spiritual life of the Aboriginal communities, to note the contemporary interest of the dominant culture in supporting and extending social and community relationships in Western democracies. As Winter (2000, p.23) notes "These sorts of social relationships [characterised by mutual trust and reciprocity] are said to be laden with social capital—the norms and networks that enable people to act collectively." Noel



Person draws attention to the fact that it is the decimation of traditional economic society that has destroyed aspects of Indigenous self-reliance. He argues strongly for a reaffirmation of Indigenous cultural approaches to achieving economic and social liberation—"in claiming the right to self determination, we are claiming the right to take responsibility" (Pearson 2000, p.154).

Bourdieu (1986, p.249) defines social capital as

the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to ... membership in a group—which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity owned capital ... It is the product of investment strategies, individual or collective, consciously or unconsciously aimed at establishing or reproducing social relationships that are directly useable in the short or long term'

Social capital, as a network of connections, is not a given norm of contemporary Western liberal societies. Indeed it could be argued that the conceptualisation of popular notions of social capital and voluntary contribution has more in common with the mutual community obligations inherent in the reciprocity of Indigenous Australian cultures.

Coleman (1988, p.100-101) refers to those aspects of social structure, which comprise of obligations and expectations, information channels, norms and effective sanctions that constrain and or encourage certain kinds of behaviour as existing "in the relations among persons". Putnam (cited in Pearson 2000) identifies six dimensions to social capital:

- *formality* - there are both formal and informal types of civic engagement;
- *purpose* - some institutions are public-regarding, some are private regarding;
- *bridging* - bonds of trust and reciprocity can bridge cleavages in society or, conversely, bring like-minded or like-ethnic individuals together;
- *immediacy* - trust may stem from immediate, face-to-face connections or generalised anonymous bonds;
- *strandedness/intensity* - at one end of this spectrum are durable, intense, and multistranded networks (i.e. people know each other through multiple, overlapping networks), at the other are the weaker, more fleeting bonds that might be created from a day of volunteering together; and
- *social location* - neighbourhood ties represent the place-based end of the social capital spectrum.

The role of family life or kinship in the construction of social capital becomes significant in determining a definition that may offer greater cultural inclusivity. In this more inclusive definition social capital is not "only formal civic engagement through voluntary organisations but informal civic engagement amongst kin, friends and neighbours" (Winter 2000, p.28). This definitional process generates a way of appreciating the extensive and deep levels of volunteer activity engaged in by Indigenous communities. In this way there is recognition of cultural difference as a strength and resource, rather than a weakness or problem (McMahon 1995).

In traditional Indigenous cultural contexts providing assistance, helping, giving time and supporting family and community is interwoven with kinship responsibilities and obligations (Lynn, Thorpe and Miles 1998). It is in more recent capitalist liberal contexts that the separation of family and work has created a segmented notion of the use of time, labour, social contribution and the professionalising and specialising of paid and non paid work activities (Jordan 1984). Research conducted by James

Cook University (cited in Lynn, Thorpe and Miles 1998) identifies the primacy of family/cultural connection that might typify Indigenous ways of providing assistance in sharp contrast to the individualised notion of Western helping:

For both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, the family and community are of central significance and group interests and needs are a fundamental part of an individuals sense identity and self fulfilment (Lynn, Thorpe and Miles 1998 p.65).

The notion of the development of community support, volunteer activity, personal care assistance or contribution to human service organisations may in this context be viewed as organic, systemic and holistic, rather than as an altruistically motivated, quantifiable or instrumental commodity provided to an agency or community out of free will or largesse (Lynn, Thorpe and Miles 1998 p.70).

### Indigenous voluntary effort

Indigenous communities still confront overt and covert racism both structural and informal. The socio-economic legacy and the trauma of past policies, stemming from notions of *Terra Nullius*, including assimilation; removal of children; exclusion from sovereignty, citizenship status and human rights entitlements, continue to impact on Indigenous communities and families. Since the 60s referendum and policy shifts in the 70s and 80s toward self-determination, Native Title and Reconciliation volunteering in Indigenous community contexts has developed a focus on self-help, survival, resistance and cultural affirmation. The establishment of Indigenous organisations from Aboriginal Legal Rights to Aboriginal Health agencies has primarily been the result of Indigenous voluntary community activism (ATSIC 1999). Policies of self-determination from the late 60s have required the substantially voluntary time and effort of Aboriginal people on innumerable boards, committees, government inquiries and consultative bodies from local, state and national levels and often across a diverse range of issue areas including health, education, arts, sports, youth to tourism, economic development and criminal justice sectors. The immense contribution of Indigenous people to mainstream society through cultural tourism, contribution to land management and in advisory capacities regarding the delivery of mainstream services to all citizens is often unacknowledged by the wider society.

As mainstream agencies have neither adequately reached, nor appropriately catered for, the diverse range Indigenous community members and/or may be perceived as antipathetic to long term goals for self-determination structures for ensuring consultation with Indigenous peoples and/or the direct provision of support services through self-help Indigenous agencies, have continued to be a mainstay of contribution to community well being.

Research on Indigenous voluntary work conducted by the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research acknowledged that participation in mainstream employment and training is affected by culturally-based attitudes and behaviours and that work activities (paid and non-paid) in the informal economy are not easily accommodated in labour force and ABS categorisations (Altman and Taylor 1996). The 1994 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survey was the first major empirical research to attempt to capture the extent of Indigenous voluntary work in Australia. The survey essentially highlights that a significant amount of voluntary work takes place in Indigenous communities and that this is even greater in rural

and remote communities. Indigenous volunteer work was reported to be most likely to occur outside of a capital city. Indigenous people volunteered less in capital city areas, however the rate of volunteering was evenly spread between other (eg outer) metropolitan areas (39%) and rural communities (36%). Based on ATSI regional council areas volunteering was most prevalent in remote regions including Broome (volunteer rate of over 57% of Indigenous working age population); Central Australia (42%) and Western Desert region (40%).

Volunteer rates were consistently high in South Australia—with high concentrations of volunteer effort recorded in Port Augusta and Ceduna regions. Other key findings of the survey are summarised in Figure 1.

**Figure 1. Key findings from the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey (1994)**

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**Participation rates**

- Indigenous voluntary work participation rate of 26.9% for those aged 15 years and over. 49 515 persons reported involvement in voluntary work, of these 49.8% were males and 50.2% were females
- Indigenous Australians engaged in voluntary work more than non-Indigenous Australians. 20% of Indigenous Australians aged 15 and over engaged in voluntary work. If hunting and gathering activities are excluded from the definition then the rate of Indigenous volunteering is revised to 19% which is still higher than for non-Indigenous counterparts
- Indigenous voluntary work was conducted by younger people more so than for non-Indigenous Australians—56% of Indigenous volunteers were aged 34 years and under compared to a highest rate 27% for 35 -44 year old non Indigenous volunteers
- 14% of volunteers were non-dependent children in sole parent households aged 15 years or over not attending a school or tertiary institution full time
- 44% of Indigenous volunteers were also employed in mainstream employment compared to 65% of non-Indigenous volunteers
- 36% of Indigenous volunteers were officially classed as not in the labour force compared to 31% of non-Indigenous volunteers. A further 20% of Indigenous volunteers were classed as officially unemployed compared to only 4% of the non Indigenous volunteers

**Number of hours**

- Number of hours of volunteer work per week:
  - 5% engaged in full time equivalent voluntary work
  - 16% reporting volunteering between 11 and 34 hours per week
  - 79% reporting volunteering less than 10 hours per week

**Type of work**

- The most common types of voluntary work engaged in by Indigenous Australians were hunting and gathering (27%); community and sports organisations (23%); working on committees (20%); working with schools or youth (15%); caring for sick or aged people (10%); and an undefined area of community contribution through voluntary effort of (5%)

*Voluntary work was defined as unpaid community work including willingly giving unpaid help in the form of time, skills or service to an organisation or group or subsistence hunting and gathering)*

Source: Altman and Taylor 1996

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## Implications of the literature for current research

For Indigenous people, providing “choices about the types of social and economic participation [people] engage in” requires consultation and equal participation in the development of policies and programs that affect communities. As ATSI (1999 p.12) argues Government must respect the abilities and rights of Indigenous Australians to determine appropriate solutions to their own needs at the local level.

Whether voluntary activity by Indigenous people in particular sites is by *choice*—that is, Indigenous volunteers prefer or are more motivated by culturally familiar environments; *necessity*—by way of sheer demand to meet needs of communities by providing agencies with solidarity and support in the maelstrom of a dominant ethnocentric market context; or whether there is evidence of active or embedded practices of exclusion in relation to voluntary activities being undertaken in more culturally diverse contexts, is a challenging theme in this timely study. The literature presented suggests a combination of each of these operates in the current social milieu.

## Literature review – non-English speaking background communities

Australia's population comprises approximately 74% of people of Anglo-Celtic background; 19% of European background and 4.5% of Asian background (the last two categories representing more than 170 countries and one hundred languages and most often referred to as people from non-English speaking background); and 2% of Aboriginal people. In the 1998-99 financial year 80,000 migrants and refugees entered Australia (DIMA 1999).

Although there is often a tendency to regard people of non-English speaking background as one category, it is necessary to recognise that this group is diverse and that there is much difference, controversy and changing dynamics within NESB communities (Jakubowicz & Meekosha 1986). As Cox (1989 p.147) maintains, ethnic groups' social organisation is influenced by background factors, migration patterns and what they confront in the host society. Callan (1986) also notes that some ethnic groups are far more vocal than others and often their experience is taken as the norm for all immigrants.

Studies of volunteering in Australia have largely focused on the mainstream—that is, people of English-speaking background, with minimal reference to minority group volunteers/volunteering. For example, Vellekoop-Baldock (1990, p.34) studied the background, work conditions and motivations of volunteers in forty-two welfare organisations in Western Australia. Two of the organisations chosen were specifically set up for the welfare of Aboriginal people, but indicated no involvement of Aboriginal volunteers. 70 % of volunteers in the organisations were white, Australian born, 30% were born overseas, with only 4% from non-English speaking countries. In follow-up interviews with paid staff and volunteers it became clear that "the low representation of non-English speaking workers created difficulties in servicing clients" (Vellekoop-Baldock 1990, p.35). There was also evidence of bias and prejudice by the predominantly Anglo-Australian volunteers. Vellekoop-Baldock (1990, p.82) conclude by suggesting there is a "segregated labour force in volunteering comparable to that in the paid workforce".

In a more recent study of volunteering and social capital in Adelaide, Baum et al (1999) note that more native English speakers report being volunteers than do non-English speakers. They suggest that planners need to address barriers to volunteering if they want to encourage trust and reciprocity and avoid further marginalisation of some groups.

## Nature and range of Voluntary Activity by NESB Groups

People of non-English speaking background volunteer in both ethnic specific contexts and in the wider community. The 1995 ABS study (1996) of volunteers within organisations in Australia showed that 20.9% of Australian born persons perform such voluntary work (18.4% of males, 23.4% of females over 15). This is compared with 20.0% of persons born in other English speaking countries (17.5% of males, 22.6% of females over 15) and 9.2% of persons born in non-English speaking countries (8.2% of males, 10.1% of females over 15). Jamrozik (1996) criticises these figures in that they only include volunteering in organisations. He argues that many people volunteer informally (outside of organisations), particularly people from NESB and thus the figures are "a gross misrepresentation" (Jamrozik 1996, p.18).

The 1988 ABS (1989) survey of community and volunteer work in SA (within and outside of organisations) found a significantly higher volunteer rate for people born in Australia (26.7%) compared with people born in Europe (11.6%) and Asia (9.5%). Jamrozik (1996) again argues that voluntary work, as traditionally perceived in Australia is part of the 'English colonial inheritance' and he challenges the ABS to move beyond imposed definitions of volunteering to reflect the multicultural reality of Australia.

During December 1991, 41% of people seeking volunteer opportunities at the Volunteer Centre of SA were born overseas and of these 60% were from non-English speaking backgrounds (Ethnic Communities Council of SA 1992).

Martin (1990, p.7) argues that the stereotype "ethnics don't volunteer" is wrong and restrictive. She also questions the stereotype that "only ethnics can help ethnics". As Director of the Volunteer Centre of SA at the time, she argues that people of NESB are actively involved in volunteering within their own communities and in the mainstream. In order to open up opportunities and improve services, she encourages ethnic community organisations to recruit volunteers from different cultural backgrounds and challenges mainstream organisations to assess the cultural backgrounds of their volunteers to see if they reflect the fact that one in four South Australians are born overseas.

Limited studies conducted thus far reveal that people from NESB volunteer within their own ethnic communities. For example, Becker (1993) documents the process of the establishment of the Association of Ethnic Organisations for Aged Care in SA., while Hopkins (1993, p.16) cites many examples of volunteer effort by people of NESB in SA., describing volunteering as "the only means by which each community could establish itself and maintain its culture and support of each other".

Examples in the literature of NESB volunteering in the mainstream are limited, but include organisations such as Lifeline (Roffey and Moloney 1991) and events such as The Sydney 2000 Olympic games (El-Telegraph, 1998).

There is thus an identifiable gap in the literature on people from NESB in terms of their volunteer effort and community involvement both within and outside their own cultural groups. It is imperative that the assumption *not* be made that these people do not volunteer simply because there is thus far little empirical evidence of such activity. Rather, there is an obvious need to fill the gap in the literature by undertaking research into volunteering in NESB communities.

## Self-help as government policy

There has long been, and continues to be, much critique regarding the use of self-help tactics and community/volunteer effort to augment—or even deliver—services which are arguably the province of the state. For example, in the 1980s there was much analysis and critique of government policy on ethnic welfare, especially in relation to policies of self-help (Petruchenia & Marchant 1981; Marchant 1985; Petruchenia 1986). Petruchenia (1986) notes that confusion exists about the meaning and interpretation of self-help within ethnic groups. Is it, she asks, that 'we have to help ourselves' or that 'we are being empowered to develop services for our own ends'?

Marchant (1985, 1986) analyses in detail the concepts of self-help and voluntarism within the ethnic welfare sector. Her paper is particularly relevant in that it indicates that it may be within the provision of post-arrival services to immigrants and refugees in the late 1970s that volunteerism was first promoted as Australian government policy. The Australian government "encouraged ethnic groups to form organisations, develop appropriate social welfare programs and apply for funding by submission" (Marchant 1986, p.166). This policy received both approval and criticism. Marchant (1986, p.162) argues, "it contained, through self-help, a way to place responsibility for meeting welfare needs back onto the community", whilst Jakubowicz and Meekosha (1986) saw the strategy as a cheap way of meeting ethnic welfare needs by the government and noted the lower status, opportunities and conditions of work in the voluntary sector. They also criticised the dichotomy of ethno-specific and mainstream services.

More recently, Tony Pun spoke at a FECCA Conference (1998) about the importance of democracy at the community level involving community volunteers. He criticised the fact that much special need funding of ethnic community organisations has now been cut and often re-directed to mainstream organisations through tendering processes.

Similarly, Kerr and Savelsberg (1997, 1999) question the utilisation by governments of community resources, particularly in terms of volunteer effort being co-opted to perform tasks which are arguably more appropriate to paid workers.

## Motivation for volunteering by people of NESB

In Hopkins' (1993) study of perceptions of volunteering in a multicultural society, NESB volunteers gave the following reasons for volunteering: mutual support and care; the response to a need (including disaster, crisis or political imperatives); personal beliefs; to give something back; a sense of belonging; and personal satisfaction and enjoyment. There was a strong recognition of the value of volunteering through social action and community concern. Volunteering was clearly a matter of survival for some and often the expression of a desire to reciprocate.

Sometimes the motivation to volunteer may relate more to the individual needs of the volunteers. For example, Salisbury Council in SA initiated a community arts project in response to a survey of the needs of people of NESB in their area, which indicated that many people of NESB were isolated and had limited English skills and access to services. A group of women from four different ethnic groups volunteered their skills to work with community artists to produce a wall-hanging. In return, the

women were able to access help with English language and were also connected with other activities and other local communities (Karpfen 1993).

Once again, the paucity of literature on volunteering and NESB communities means that it is difficult to propose measures which would build on existing motivation and encourage and support people to participate not only within their own ethnic communities but also in wider society.

### **Supports and barriers to volunteering by people of NESB**

There are several studies that have identified some potential barriers and supports in terms of factors which may encourage or prohibit volunteering by people of NESB. For example, Vangelista (1999) notes the ongoing need for policy that encourages volunteering in ethnic specific activities meeting particular cultural and language needs, and at the same time a multicultural approach to all volunteering, reflecting the diversity of Australia's population. There is a danger that current government initiatives act as a barrier to the fostering of these ideals of promotion of ethnic specific activities. As Pun (1998) notes, the adoption of a tendering/purchaser/provider model of funding of community welfare organisations has meant that some smaller ethnic community organisations have lost their funding to larger, mainstream non-government service providers.

Cox's (1989) work is still particularly relevant. He stresses the importance of access and equity policies, equal employment opportunity policies and anti-discrimination legislation, understanding and awareness in government and all relevant organisations in responding to Australia's multicultural reality (Cox 1989, p.227). His discussion of organisational responses to cultural diversity is particularly relevant to an analysis of barriers and supports for volunteers of NESB background in formal/organisational mainstream contexts. Mainstream organisations, he says, need to act at the organisational level, the program level and the personnel level if they are to be responsive to their multicultural context (1989, p. 216).

Vangelista (1999, p.37) suggests that opening up programs to volunteers of all backgrounds requires the setting up of advisory groups, networking with NESB groups, shared decision making and using ethnic media. Vangelista's views and recommendations echo much of what Martin (1990) suggested in response to the stereotype that ethnics don't volunteer. In addition, Martin (1999) notes that cross-cultural training can often be deficient and points out the need for all volunteer training to include specific cross-cultural components.

Martin (1999, p.27) also states that barriers to NESB people volunteering may lie on the potential volunteer's side, due to failure to understand what volunteering means, by beliefs that volunteer services are an inappropriate intrusion into people's lives, or by fears of not being wanted. Potential volunteers need to know that they can do the task and that their language skills are sufficient. They also may need to be taught about Australian health and welfare systems, be helped with literacy skills and other skills learned in employment. Flexible arrangements may be needed if confidentiality becomes an issue, with volunteers not wanting to work in their own immediate area or group. Recruitment strategies and volunteer training need to take all these factors into account (Vangelista 1999).

Martin (1999) maintains that current practices of volunteer recruitment may not be necessarily suitable for all potential volunteers and may need to be adapted if volunteers of diverse backgrounds are to be involved in programs.

The British report of the Community Self-Help Policy Action team (Home Office 1999) identifies twenty-four barriers to effective community self-help, including: motivational; organisational; institutional; political; cultural, and economic barriers. In another relevant English government paper, it is noted that Black and minority ethnic voluntary and community organisations "feel outside the traditional structures of the voluntary and community sector" (Home Office 1998, Section 13).

In addition, older volunteers interviewed in the VIFA (Multicultural) Project (1993, p.23) expressed concerns about the difficulty of attracting younger people to volunteer in their community organisations because they "didn't feel an affinity with the past" and hadn't maintained their first language. There were also concerns that much of the voluntary leadership rested on only a few shoulders because although people wanted to help they didn't want to take on such major responsibility.

Vangelista (1999, p.35) notes that the size, age and length of establishment of an ethnic community influences their capacity to volunteer and the likely availability of professional support from the same ethnic background. In general, she says, ethnic communities have limited resources and therefore need adequate support to avoid a small number of individuals having to take responsibility for a wide range of activities.

May (1999, p.11) maintains that governments must remember that volunteering derives from personal and social motivations and from free choice, and that it "cannot be driven by policy or politics". He argues that government policy should focus on how to best facilitate and support voluntary action including "appropriate recognition, adequate resourcing of community organisations and social, economic and cultural policies that encourage inclusion of citizens, not exclusion and marginalisation".

## Summary

The arguments presented from the literature regarding definitions and conceptions of volunteering, volunteer involvement, motivation, and supports and barriers to volunteering largely reflect a general overview of issues which may, or are likely to, arise for volunteers from NESB. However, there is little evidence to date which reflects the experiences and perceptions of volunteers themselves. It is the intention of this research to go some way toward redressing what is seen as an inadequately researched area, to explore the issues from the standpoint of volunteers themselves, to make recommendations based on the findings, and point the way to further research in what is an important and fast-growing area.



# RESULTS

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## Indigenous communities

### Stage 1 - key informants

Eight key informants within the Indigenous community of Adelaide were interviewed by way of questionnaire on a one to one basis. Each of the key informants interviewed has a leadership role within the Indigenous community and their skills are in high demand across a number of key areas within Indigenous human services. Their responses are summarized below.

#### *What is your role within your community?*

All key informants were in paid employment within Aboriginal organisations, but spent additional time volunteering with other Aboriginal organisations. Each key informant reported performing more work for their organisation than they are paid to do, and considered the extra time spent assisting their community as volunteering. All key informants were involved in the management of Aboriginal organisations as committee members. Key informants clearly understood the value volunteering adds to services within the Indigenous community.

A number of key informants play prominent Elders roles within the community and act in an advisory capacity to Aboriginal organisations and government departments. Most key informants stated that they have an advocacy role within and on behalf of the Indigenous community in areas such as health, housing and the provision of access to justice.

#### *Do you call the time you give freely to other people volunteering? Are there any other terms you might use to describe this activity?*

There was a decided reluctance among the key informants to refer to time given freely to the community as volunteering, alternative descriptions such as helping or assisting were given by two key informants. One key informant reported that the Indigenous community avoided the word volunteering intentionally as this implied that those who might volunteer were somehow obligated to be at an agency on a regular basis. This commitment would not be kept, as family commitments would always take priority over work commitments within the Indigenous community.

There was an acknowledgment that much of their work has historically been known as volunteering, but this did not sit comfortably with them and there was a strong tendency to find other words to describe this activity. In the search for an Aboriginal word that best describes volunteering it was difficult to find a word to describe the activity perfectly. One key informant suggested that the Kurna word *Yerra* loosely translated means a duty of reciprocity, "that if I do something for you, you will return the favour some day". The Anangu word *Ngarpartji* has a similar meaning.

### *What type of volunteering occurs within the Indigenous community?*

Key informants indicated that the Indigenous community do not become involved in mainstream volunteering, or volunteering outside of the Indigenous community. The justification for this was that it was "something the Indigenous community was not brought up to do". There were however a number of examples of mainstream volunteering cited and these predominantly arose in sporting clubs and coaching of children's sports teams.

Most volunteering was reported to occur in the form of helping others within the Indigenous community, in the form of caring for the aged and the sick, child-minding, maintenance of yards and transportation where Indigenous people do not have transport of their own. One key informant lamented at the observation that Indigenous people seem to be doing less helping these days within their own community and had become like white people.

### *Why do the Indigenous community volunteer?*

All key informants believe that the Indigenous communities become involved in volunteering activities because "that is the way that they are"—they are always willing to help each other when problems arise or someone is in need. This seems to be something that is embedded within Indigenous culture.

There was a strongly held view from the key informants that volunteering was an activity that was practiced by non-Aboriginal people of the middle and upper classes within society and that Indigenous people did not participate in structured volunteering. This required a regular commitment to be at a certain place at a certain time that could not be kept as cultural activities (such as helping family or attending funerals) would always take precedent over volunteering. One key informant reported that Indigenous people did not like to be relied upon to participate in structured volunteering in case they could not attend there for some reason. This would create feelings of shame or embarrassment for them—leading to them not returning to the organisation for volunteering activities.

It was evident from the key informants that most volunteering within the Indigenous community takes place informally within the community, and always involving an exchange of social capital.

### *What are the general attitudes to volunteering and volunteers in the Indigenous communities?*

Key informants suggested that Indigenous people did not get involved in volunteering but would always help each other when needed—however this was not considered volunteering. A strong view was expressed by one key informant who believed the attitude towards volunteering in the Indigenous community has changed and that they were moving away from being a 'caring and sharing society', to becoming more like non-Aboriginal people. The key informant described with concern an attitude of 'every man for himself' as developing within communities.

The general attitude toward volunteering in a structured formal sense was that it is not something an Indigenous person becomes involved in for a number of reasons.

*To your knowledge, does the Indigenous community volunteer outside of that community?*

One key informant believed that Indigenous people did not volunteer outside of their community as they do not feel comfortable in doing so. Another pointed to the church as an area where small number of Indigenous people participated in volunteering outside of their community. There was anecdotal evidence of some Indigenous people becoming involved in the St Johns Ambulance and other service organisations such as Rotary, but these instances were described as extremely rare. Coaching of junior sporting teams was perhaps the most prevalent type of voluntary activity outside of Indigenous communities.

Being comfortable in a familiar environment and fear of racism were reasons frequently given for non-participation.

*What supports exist for people to volunteer within the Indigenous community?*

The supports provided for volunteers within the Indigenous community, particularly at an organisational level, were restricted according to some key informants because of the scarcity of resources within Indigenous organisations. Key informants were divided over the level of support provided to volunteers within the Indigenous community. Support for volunteers, where provided, was usually in the form of training, office accommodation and moral support. All key informants suggested that volunteers are valued and made to feel welcome within the Indigenous community and generally agreed that the Indigenous community provides as much support for volunteers as their resources and funding will allow.

Some agencies provided support and opportunities for volunteers to perform mutual obligation activities and Community Service Orders with their agency.

*Within your funding agreements are there any provision or requirement relating to volunteers?*

Some key informants had very clear requirements within their funding guidelines to report on the use of volunteers and measures for recruitment taken by the agency, although they were under no funding obligation to recruit volunteers. Other key informants were under no requirement to mention volunteers to their funding bodies, but used volunteers wherever possible in the provision of their services to the Indigenous community. All key informants' agencies report annually in some form about the use of volunteers in their agencies.

*Do you see any benefits in conducting this type of research? Or alternatively, do you see any disadvantages?*

Key informants saw benefits stemming from this research project. One in particular expressed the view that it would be good to measure the vast amount of informal volunteering the Indigenous community performs to "help dispel myths that we are lazy and only work for money." Another believed that this research might show that the Indigenous attitude has changed and that they are less giving than they used to be.

Mostly key informants were optimistic about the positive outcomes and recognition that will flow from the research and hopeful that it would show the wider community the high levels of non-structured volunteering being performed within the Indigenous community.

## Stage 2 - Indigenous focus groups

Three Indigenous focus groups were conducted: in Murray Bridge, Port Augusta and Adelaide metropolitan area. There was also the opportunity to undertake consultation with some members of the Patpa Warra Yunti Regional Council. Data collection was limited to these communities because of funding constraints and the limited timeframe for the project. The need to undertake a second stage of this research to embrace rural and remote communities is duly acknowledged.

Each person involved in the Focus Group discussions had extensive involvement in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community organisations.

The structure and process for the focus groups was as informal as possible in order to: (i) assist participants to feel comfortable with the process; (ii) ensure an appropriate discussion between and with participants; and (iii) ensure that it was a culturally appropriate way of collecting data.

The key areas of discussion were as follows:

1. Experiences of volunteering within the focus group.
2. The barriers to Indigenous participation in *structured volunteering*.
3. The extent to which the Indigenous community participates in the exchange of social capital.
4. Indigenous participation in voluntary management roles, such as committee work.
5. The instances where the Indigenous community participates in *mainstream volunteering*.
6. Indigenous perceptions of the coordination of volunteering services within agencies.
7. Regional issues concerning Indigenous volunteering.
8. The notion of *cultural volunteering*.
9. The future of volunteering within Indigenous communities.

### *Experiences of volunteering - fields of voluntary work and activity*

Aboriginal people are always volunteering in one way or another, whether it be on Aboriginal committees or management boards to coaching youth sporting teams in a mainstream setting...

The continuous volunteer work of Indigenous peoples was a recurring theme in the focus groups. Participants reported that the majority of Aboriginal organisations in existence at the present time were established by groups of Indigenous volunteers. They cited large numbers of Aboriginal people who give their time freely across a range of areas including:

- The advancement of native title claims by way of involvement on native title management committees.

Participants stated that "the native title process could not function but for this unpaid involvement of the Aboriginal community."<sup>4</sup> The Councils of

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<sup>4</sup> This issue should be the subject of further analysis. Participants spoke of the savings to society this activity creates by way of certainty in native title claims for pastoralists and the mining industry. This clearly has benefits for governments alike as they bear the brunt of industry criticizing the native title process. Again this has a flow on effect to the general public as they are concerned about the issues of certainty over land tenure where it concerns the mining industry in particular as it affects investments

Aboriginal community organisations are well known for the level of Indigenous volunteering that occurs there, with most committees comprising of exclusively Indigenous persons acting a voluntary capacity.

- The Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness committees (ASSPA) that exist in a number of schools where there are significant numbers of Aboriginal students attending.  
This is seen as community involvement and is direct voluntary support for their children and others within the education system. These committees serve as an advisory group to the school council in the area of Aboriginal education.
- Involvement of the local community in advisory and consultative services to government agencies and departments on issues affecting Indigenous people. For example in Port Augusta the community has been working closely with the Courts Administration Authority and the judiciary in re-establishing a Community Justice Panel and advising local government on a range of issues.
- Aboriginal Heritage Committees
- Lower Murray Nungas Club
- Kurna Aboriginal Cultural and Heritage Committee
- Aboriginal Sobriety Group
- Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness Committees
- Primary School Councils
- Aboriginal Justice Advocacy Committees
- Aboriginal Youth Action Committees
- Aboriginal Visitors Scheme
- Mobile Assistance Patrol (MAP)

Participants spoke at length of the willingness, and commitment, on the part of the Aboriginal community to become involved in the issues affecting the wider community and in civic life in general. The remainder of this section briefly describes a number of examples of voluntary activity that were reported on.

Local Aboriginal Visitors Schemes were cited repeatedly as an essential volunteer program and an important example of the work of Indigenous volunteers that enable and assist police and corrections to meet their duty of care to Aboriginal prisoners. This service is supported by the Department of State Aboriginal Affairs as a response to the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. The program is designed as a prisoner-visiting scheme to prevent Aboriginal deaths in custody and provides for a detainee to be visited by volunteers to check on their health and welfare and to see that they are comfortable whilst in custody. The service is provided around the clock, usually by Aboriginal people, in return for a small honorarium and out of pocket expenses. This program has been running for almost ten years and is provided almost exclusively by volunteer labour.

Participants also spoke of the amount of time given to encouraging and supporting younger people, family members and cultural and community functions. Most do not consider this type of working volunteering, but rather more of a communal or cultural responsibility or obligation. Support in this area is most likely to be given to

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in Australia. There has been little recognition of the massive voluntary effort of Indigenous communities who freely participate in the numerous Native Title Committees in SA to ensure a mediated and swift resolution to issues which might otherwise engage more resources, more time and more litigation.

the old, the sick and the very young—which is akin to helping those that need it the most. As one participant said “the worst thing to have is a tow-bar on your car because everyone will know and want you to move furniture or dump rubbish”.

The exchange of social capital or the investment in human capital is the area of volunteering where Indigenous communities are most active in—although few would consider this to be volunteering in the traditional sense of the word. As one participant noted “The indigenous community in Murray Bridge is always doing things for their families such as driving them around and visiting them in hospital and at times of bereavement”. To this end there is a vast exchange of social capital as the community provides support and counselling to each other during difficult times. This form of volunteering was reported to include:

- Transportation of others to the shops, doctors appointments and to visit relatives.
- Child-minding and child rearing, where there are numerous Aboriginal families raising the children of relatives so that they are not placed under the guardianship of the government.
- Counselling and grief counselling.
- Passing on of information to younger people. As one participant summarised “you have no choice but to do it”
- Checking on sick relations, as an alternative to domiciliary care.
- Visiting in-mates within prisons whether they are relatives or not.
- Cooking for and feeding people that are starving.
- Lending people money.
- Providing accommodation for visitors from out of town and putting people up that do not have accommodation.
- Yard cleaning.
- Motor vehicle maintenance.
- Painting houses.
- Furniture removal.
- Involvement in community affairs.

These tasks were undertaken “from a deep feeling of responsibility for others in the community. Culturally, there are some people that you cannot refuse ... you have no choice about helping them”. The type of things Aboriginal people gave back to their community or immediate families did however vary. Some provided direct assistance such as giving food and other goods to those that needed it, whereas others did not agree with the giving of things they saw as essential for their own survival, but would always give their time and energy freely to others. This might involve painting someone's house or mowing his or her lawns.

A small number of Aboriginal people reported volunteering in the Emergency Services—Aboriginal people are sometimes recruited to assist the Country Fire Service in Port Augusta for example.

One participant in a rural setting made the point that:

There are huge amounts of “Informal Volunteering” going on in this Aboriginal community that we should rejoice in, acknowledge and celebrate as we have families helping families.

“Cultural volunteering” took place whereby the traditional owners of country would formally welcome guests and visitors to their country and community. “Cultural

volunteering also occurs where the local traditional owners of that country often welcome visitors to country." This was not seen as a volunteering activity per se but perceived as being "a part of one's responsibility to country". Others cited cultural volunteering as the need or request to be always providing welcoming in language or at official functions—sometimes taken for granted by mainstream agencies but always expected for visitors and tourists.

Just look at our massive contribution to Australia's profile at the Olympics—not only did we win gold—but the world saw amazing cultural performances—mainly volunteer led, organised and performed!

Another area of cultural volunteering reported upon was conducting bush tucker tours with students at the schools.

It was also reported that many Elders in the area had been involved for many years in volunteering their services within national parks. This has taken the form of assisting and managing tourists and has historically been a very important part of the tourism industry in areas such as the Flinders Ranges.

One participant claimed that "every Aboriginal worker is a volunteer" as Aboriginal people regularly seek out such workers to assist him or her with their problems or to provide support—most often after hours. Participation in Aboriginal community activities often leads to contact of a work related nature after-hours—"Aboriginal leaders are leaders 24 hours a day seven days a week". Many Aboriginal workers reported working far more hours for and with their communities than is actually reflected in their pay packets and this can only be considered as volunteering—it is for the benefit of the community and they are not being paid for it. Similarly many Non-Indigenous workers rely on their Indigenous colleagues for advice and support. As one senior Aboriginal participant stated: "When the reconciliation process got going again—some of us thought oh no—here we go again, having to educate the community all over again about who we are!"

Another reported example of volunteering was the establishment of an interagency forum by Aboriginal Workers to improve services and support for the community in the region concerned. This group has 31 workers representing all agencies in the area that come together regularly to network and assess shortfalls in service-delivery to the Indigenous community and coordinate urgent family support. This group comprises both government and non-government agencies and much of the work is performed out of hours, for the benefit of the community and without recompense. Many hours are spent talking to and listening to the Indigenous community—far above what they are paid to do. This comes from a personal commitment the workers have to their people that "does not end when the clock reaches five o'clock".

You don't stop being Aboriginal when you walk out the door and family and community expect your assistance—you have obligations and reciprocal responsibility, not just to your family but to the wider Indigenous community always.

In both metropolitan and country areas participants reported on the significant amount of mainstream volunteering within sports clubs. Aboriginal people were active participants in coaching and on the committees. This normally comes from some other involvement in the club such as being as player or having their children involved with the club in some way.

An example of a specific volunteer project being run by volunteers in the Murray Bridge region is a crime prevention program that involves Indigenous youth making a speed car to race. This initiative came from Indigenous volunteers concerned with the high number of vehicle related offences among young people in the area that led to high-speed chases with the police. This program is supervised by a number of volunteers within Aboriginal agencies in the local area in their own time and appears to be a very effective program that has arisen from community action and commitment.

Similarly (as summarised in Appendix B) The Umeewarra Media Service in Port Augusta originated as a voluntary run service—it employs over six people but still relies on community volunteers to operate.

The Mobile Assistance Program (MAP), is an alcohol rehabilitation program that picks intoxicated people up and transports them to sobering up facilities. This program is generally staffed by volunteers working with some paid employees. Significantly this service operates in metropolitan Adelaide, Port Augusta and the remote communities in the Far North of the state.

Voluntary vermin control programmes function in the Anangu Pitjantjara Lands in the northwest that contribute greatly to the environment and its protection.

#### *Why do people get involved in these activities?*

The main motivations cited for involvement in voluntary activity—often described as helping or responsibility or taking care—were related to a sense of community, kinship, responsibility, reciprocity, as a part of surviving together and contributing to each other. This sense of sharing and giving back was characterised as a feature of Indigenous life—“a not negotiable part of being Aboriginal.” The sentiments expressed by one participant capture this well

My father used to hunt kangaroo then share it around, giving it away to others... as kids we asked why bother going to all that trouble if you are just going to give it away—why not go to the supermarket or just hunt and keep for ourselves after all we did the effort? ... and he explained it was part of mutual responsibility and just what you did, needed to do, he explained that the whole thing from getting it to giving it away was important.

Significantly many did not consider this type of working to be volunteering, but more of a communal or cultural responsibility or obligation. Participants—without negative connotations, reluctance or victimisation, unanimously prided this approach. There was a wry humour on occasions about the extent to which people were contributing to ensure the accountability of mainstream services to the community; a sense of deep pride regarding sharing culture and land knowledge with others; and an awareness of the centrality of voluntary effort to self determination and autonomy.

Participants explained that it was most important to support the most needy first and to reach out to one's own family and community—and that this may mean Aboriginal people generally helping in Aboriginal organisations, because this is where the greatest need lies. It was seen as a duty, an honour and a deep responsibility to provide mutual support and to assist on committees, in schools, in emergencies and in providing information and education to other citizens about Aboriginal culture. There was a generosity of spirit expressed across all of the group



discussions and an awareness that whilst not known as volunteers, this exchange of social capital was clearly a massive contribution of volunteer effort to Australian society.

The genesis of one voluntary community support network, known as the Grannies Group (see Appendix B) was described as very much an exercise in voluntary community support for Aboriginal families that are having problems. This voluntary group wish to remain an informal group that bond together from love and concern for the Aboriginal community, and in particular Aboriginal youth. There was a complete absence of any sense of status or desire for recognition for voluntary effort—indeed the opposite was cited. People wished to downplay individual involvements completely but to emphasise the group or community nature of activities and speak with pride of outcomes and achievements around issues not personalities. There was a strong view that mainstream volunteering was about doing things 'to people' and not 'with people and for people'. Participants did not want to be associated with that a 'do gooder' mentality or with people, Indigenous or non-Indigenous, who became overly formal or bureaucratic in their ways. The notable persons in their view were those who did not contribute or share the reciprocity of action and involvement—and generally such people were seen as outside of the community or becoming "like a white man—with white fella values".

Participants believed that the motivation for volunteering was different for differing sectors of the community with young people participating in volunteering activities largely in order to gain skills and experience that might lead to employment.

#### *Who gets involved in voluntary activities?*

Interestingly, those Indigenous people that are considered to possess the means to do so are expected to give time to others more so than other sections of the Indigenous community. This can create more stress and responsibility for those people that are working. These people will be contacted outside of normal working hours to give advice and support to the Aboriginal community and many Aboriginal leaders are on multiple committees and have overlapping professional and private responsibilities.

Members of focus groups commented that some people would participate in volunteering activities in order to gain access to a network or be a part of a system; an example of this would be the Aboriginal Foster Parent's recruitment program which involves families or family groups.

A shift in societal arrangements was also reported on by the focus group where an observation was made that the traditional Aboriginal extended family was slowly disappearing and there is an inward movement. It was said that Aboriginal families increasingly resembled non-Aboriginal nuclear families today. As one metropolitan participant reported

Perhaps assimilation is winning and young people don't care as much now. Young people are not helping as much as they used to and the age group most involved in all types of volunteering in the Indigenous community is still the older members of the community.

Others acknowledged that the Aboriginal Youth Advisory Committees network, which has been in existence for a number of years, was a positive voluntary contribution made by young Aboriginal people towards community. Participants

reported that many young people within extended families assume responsibility for the care of younger children however this was more evident the further away from metropolitan centres the community is located. There was a perception that country areas and more traditional communities rely on voluntary effort for all civic facilities and functioning more so than in metropolitan and urban communities.

In all of the focus groups participants spoke of a gender balance in terms of volunteering activities and particularly in relation to cultural activities. Community obligations and family support were very much a mutual area of responsibility and there was little gender segmentation of activities, participation or responsibilities.

The breakdown of community life and tradition and the ongoing trauma stemming from the stolen generation led to the difficulty of some people in being able to give more time voluntarily to others:

Many Aboriginal people just don't have anything they can give to others. Most do not have the time to give because they are struggling to survive. They are struggling to survive, but would give their last piece of bread to another person who had nothing.

#### *Supports and barriers to volunteering*

[In the Indigenous community] environmental changes have also prevented Aboriginal people from providing social capital within their community by not being able to hunt traditional foods anymore. Up until recently it was a common occurrence for Aboriginal people to share the bounty of their labours such as rabbits, fish and other products of Aboriginal hunting with families that could not hunt or that had nothing.

In two out of three focus groups it was reported these instances are far less prevalent than before and that the community and culture have suffered as a result. Participants advised that the tradition of hunting and gathering and sharing the proceeds has shifted in recent times in the minds of the younger Indigenous community, who are now saying that there was no point in catching a lot of fish or kangaroo if you were only going to give it away. Some felt that there was a trend in Aboriginal communities today toward Aboriginal people becoming more like "white people and only worrying about themselves."

The pressure to conform to a more competitive and individualised world of mainstream employment and obtain a "house in the suburbs" was making it harder for people to remain conscious of reciprocal responsibilities. Some pointed to the irony in the attack on Indigenous ways of life, characterised as essentially about the bonds of social contribution, responsibility and mutual obligation whilst conversely mainstream Australian society were seeking to reinvigorate these notions of volunteerism and social capital. Community Development Employment Programs (CDEPs) were seen as good base to enable volunteering "as it gets people moving and active". Almost all focus group participants saw the CDEP as a special and valuable model combining some paid employment and some voluntary work. To this end it was argued that the CDEP should deal with aspects of Aboriginal poverty first then move towards business ventures. There was a strong perception that Indigenous community volunteers tend to be active with more than one organisation—with the "busiest and most committed being the one's most often sought out to help".

Some members of the focus groups perceived the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) as actively dissuading Indigenous organisations from using and recruiting volunteers due to perceived difficulties in providing proper insurance for the volunteers. It was also a perception that Centrelink did not like people in receipt of benefits to perform voluntary work anywhere. At two of the focus groups no one had heard of Volunteering SA, and stated "that there would need to be an increased focus upon Indigenous volunteering to alter that situation."

A barrier to Indigenous participation in volunteering was the fact that Indigenous people were often subjected to police checks before they were accepted as volunteers in some areas. An example of this lies in the area of Aboriginal child-care and child placements. Participation was often negated due to the prospective volunteer not wishing to be subjected to a police check, or indeed having the check done and being ineligible due to past criminal convictions—mostly of a minor nature.

*In the broader community context*

All agreed that from their experience there was little mainstream volunteering performed by the Aboriginal community. The explanation was offered that Aboriginal people did not feel comfortable within unfamiliar environments and often lacked the confidence to participate in any event.

If more Aboriginal people participated in mainstream volunteering this would promote greater involvement by other Aboriginal people—as one participant explained "we seldom attend anything on our own because we do not feel comfortable". There is a feeling of safety in numbers with Aboriginal people, which permeates through to the lack of participation in mainstream volunteering.

Some perceived racism and discrimination as potential reasons for the lack of Indigenous participation in mainstream volunteering and gave anecdotal evidence to support this proposition. This included not being invited to people's homes even though they were helping the community like everyone else; being involved in service agencies but feeling token or again excluded from certain positions or social events; being involved in giving sporting assistance in the mainstream but not being involved in the committees or barbeques. As a consequence most participants explained that Indigenous volunteering within a structured setting is therefore performed within Indigenous organisations. An alternative explanation was that Indigenous people tend to devote their time and energy to where and who needs it the most and there is a perception that non-Indigenous organisations have enough people to help them.

In one region participants cited difficulties in accessing voluntary services and the community had had to fight to gain access to mainstream services such as domiciliary care and Meals on Wheels. This was seen to diminish the propensity for Aboriginal people to become involved in voluntary work with such agencies. Before these services became available, the community assumed these responsibilities and still provides these services in the majority of cases—perceiving that not only was their assistance not welcome—but that their own contribution to community life was undervalued or rendered invisible when public affirmation for volunteering (community awards, publicity etc) was given out in mainstream society—"People are always saying that Aboriginal people do not volunteer, but that is crap."

Some participants perceived that there was little coordination between volunteer services and agencies, although a few were aware that Volunteering SA "does a bit of this work". It was stated "there needs to be more coordination in this area so that each agency will know what is available." They noted however that there were no Aboriginal people on the Board of Volunteering SA and argued that this might assist in increasing Aboriginal participation in volunteering.

One participant raised concern that agencies do not even try to recruit Indigenous volunteers stating that they believed that "the Victim Support Program does not have any Aboriginal volunteers and given the high rate of Aboriginal people who are the victims of crime in the community, violence, drugs, theft etc" they believed this to be inappropriate. Their concern focused on the invisibility of the true needs of Aboriginal community members for inclusion in policies and program priorities when these were being developed as well as operationalised.

Some participants thought it would be beneficial to volunteers if an agency such as Volunteering SA were to provide some basic training for volunteers and then the agency to which the volunteer returned would provide specific intensive training to the volunteer during their placement. Greater support for training in and between Indigenous and non-Indigenous agencies and greater exchange and contact between volunteer agencies was seen as important to overcome barriers and breakdown cultural biases.

It was also stated most strongly that due to issues of isolation and lack of support there needed to be more support and training for volunteers in country regions. This raised an equity issue in relation to what services are available in the metropolitan area for volunteers.

Another avenue of mainstream volunteering by the Indigenous community are church groups such as the Assemblies of God and Jehovah's Witnesses that have Indigenous members. Their involvement may take the form of helping out with church activities such as fetes, building new churches and/or the recruitment of new members. The Jehovah's Witnesses was cited as having quite a large Aboriginal congregation in South Australia that actively volunteers in many church activities. This mainstream religious involvement was seen as perhaps the most integrated area of Indigenous and non-Indigenous activity and many felt it sat comfortably alongside, not necessarily detracting from, Aboriginal community and kinship ties.

Volunteers within the community media were cited as instrumental in attracting business and revenue to the broader community where the service is located and to community media nationally as they are always advertising their services and working to market standards.

The lack of reimbursement for out of pocket expenses was seen as an important barrier for many Aboriginal people who wished to volunteer. The costs of transport, parking and other expenses prohibited or restricted the amount of work some participants were able to undertake. Participants felt that the burden of these costs was often underestimated by organisations.

### Stage 3 – interviews with volunteers

Interviews were conducted with twenty-two individual volunteers within the Indigenous community. Some were conducted face to face and others over the telephone. A semi-structured interview schedule comprising both closed and open ended questions was used for each interview. In consultation with the projects partners minor amendments were made to the schedule used for NESB interviews (see Appendix A).

Participants ranged in age from 18 years through to Elders in their sixties. 80% were over 25 years and the remaining 20% were below 25 years. Of those over 25 years some 55% were over 50 years and 45% were 25-49 years. An equal balance of gender and a range of area of volunteering activity were sought. Thirteen women and nine men participated spanning areas of youth programs, women's groups, school committees, counselling and support programmes, sporting clubs, legal services, drug and alcohol rehabilitation programmes and child-care.

Demographically most of the individual interviews were conducted with people from the metropolitan area, although one person contacted was located in a rural community and a number of the interviewees had worked/volunteered in or had extensive knowledge of a range of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community organisations and settings. As indicated elsewhere in this report, it is the view of the researchers that an extension of this study to identify the specific nature of Indigenous volunteering practice in rural and remote communities and supports and barriers is considered essential. Two people from the interview group had strong connections with the Torres Strait Islander communities and one was a person of non-Indigenous background who worked and volunteered extensively in the Indigenous community and was accepted and supported by Indigenous colleagues. Most of the volunteers interviewed during stage three of the research were also involved in a voluntary capacity in the management of a number of Indigenous organisations by way of committee and board participation.

The following section summarises the responses of participants across a range of topics.

#### *Type of volunteering undertaken*

The majority were engaged in some form of cultural and/or community service/family support activity. Preservation, education and/or advocacy for community and cultural rights, along with youth support and education were described as the main areas of voluntary effort. Business and professional people who provided legal support or career and business guidance on a voluntary basis—some in formal structured settings and others through informal networks. None of those interviewed listed emergency services as an area of their voluntary work. The categories and frequency of volunteer activity is summarised in Figure 2.

Figure 2 Type of voluntary activity undertaken by interviewees

NB many interviewees were active in more than one organisation

Organisation management	4	Community Service	6
Education/Training	5	Health/Welfare	5
Sport/Recreation/Hobby	3	Family assistance	5
Business/Professional	2	Religion/Culture	6
Law/Political	4	Arts	3

### *Volunteering in organisations*

With one exception all have volunteered within organisations at different times. The one exception had exclusively volunteered in a non-structured informal setting and working individually with informal networks such as through the "Granny's Group". Most of the interviewees volunteered in Indigenous organisations and the majority, indeed all but one, had voluntary connections with multiple organisations.

### *How did you find out about the organisation?*

All had become aware of the Indigenous organisations they volunteer within as a result of their involvement within the community or via family knowledge and involvement—particularly those related to children's services, prisons, health issues and heritage or Native Title matters. This has given rise to family participation within many of the South Australian Indigenous organisations.<sup>5</sup> Aboriginal community networks are also extremely effective in providing information about organisational activities and where needs exist or which organisations are comfortable to work with/for.

### *Volunteering outside of organisational settings*

Volunteering outside of institutional/organisational frameworks was reported as the greatest area of volunteer activity within the Indigenous community. All participants had significant involvement in this area by way of helping others within the community in "many wonderful ways", as one interviewee stated. The exchanging of social capital among the volunteers in terms of mutual support, community self help and acting as peer motivators, advisers, informal counsellors and carers was most prominent amongst those interviewed and is clearly the area of volunteering in which all of the people interviewed are most active.

These activities included:

- Making arrangements for funerals on behalf of bereaved families.
- Taking sick people to doctors and hospital appointments.
- Transporting those without transport to shops and to pay bills.
- Respite and long-term child-care arrangements.
- Providing food and money to those that are destitute.
- Providing accommodation for those that are homeless.
- Providing advice to members of the community outside of normal working hours.
- Checking on sick relatives.
- Providing advice on conflict management or acting as mediator.
- Visiting relatives or others in prison or accompanying them to courts.
- Providing additional school support to others (for example, reading support).
- Linking people to services and/or acting as their advocates.
- Filling out forms for people and assisting them with bureaucracies.
- Being involved in youth camps or extension and cultural programs.
- Helping and supporting friends discover their past heritage and encouraging them to find lost relatives or identity.
- Being there for people in times of difficulty, keeping them out of gaol or away from drugs alcohol or gambling.

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<sup>5</sup> It must be stated here that the research team are not asserting that organisations practice nepotism, merely that many community people become involved and interested via family members and that this can prompt volunteer involvement of others in the family networks.

One volunteer summarised their position as follows,

Due to my standing in a number of communities I am often called upon to give advice on a range of issues to a broad and diverse community, both personally and professionally.

This is consistent with the responses given by a number of leading Indigenous people who spoke of the demands placed upon them as leaders and Elders. This is also seen as a strength within the community and leads to an added responsibility to help others. It could be said that there is a high duty of care to the community placed upon its leaders.

#### *Volunteering exclusively within your cultural group*

The overwhelming response to this question was that most of the Indigenous community volunteer almost exclusively within their own community. However there are a number of instances where volunteering occurs in the mainstream community. This is most prevalent by Indigenous people contributing towards the boards and committees of mainstream organisations, such as community arts centres and school councils. Interestingly, one participant had been responsible for representing the multicultural community on the Population Council. In this instance the Indigenous interviewee was actually serving both the ATSI and the NESB communities! Some of the interviewees spoke of links between agencies but not one had experience of encouragement for shared voluntary resources or being involved across a community through their volunteering.

#### *Volunteering outside of the Indigenous community*

This question was intended to examine the reasons for Indigenous non-participation in mainstream volunteering. Each volunteer stated that they did not volunteer in the mainstream organisations mainly because they did not feel comfortable in doing so. Others stated that they did not know how to become involved because they did not know much about these organisations. A number of interviewees spoke of feeling isolated and not welcomed by "mainstream" agencies. Some senior members however had experienced interesting coalitions of interests over reconciliation events and/or the republican movement or anti racism events. These tended however to be issue based times when a range of multicultural organisations and volunteers would come together and disband later. More importantly, the main point agreed upon was that the Indigenous community volunteered within their own community because that is where they are needed the most and there are plenty of volunteers that help out non-Indigenous organisations but few help out the Indigenous organisations. It is clear that the Indigenous community make conscious choices to volunteer within their own community. All of those interviewed *preferred* and were active within the Indigenous community at organisational and informal volunteering levels.

#### *Volunteering in multicultural organisations and events*

Over 60% of those interviewed indicated that they had volunteered in multicultural organisations or events. As cited above one person had in fact represented a multicultural perspective in addition to an Indigenous perspective at senior levels in a voluntary context. Others worked voluntarily for multicultural youth support services and some listed anti-racism events, the republican movement and arts and cultural agencies. As one participant explained

everyone has cultural heritage—the notion that the dominant culture is the ‘norm’ or the ‘mainstream’ whilst the rest of us—Indigenous peoples and NESB peoples are the ones with a culture—is patronising and just plain wrong! The issue is whose voice is being heard and how is culture included in the dominant decision making processes.

#### *Length of time involved in volunteering*

Most of those interviewed had been involved in community organisations and/ or voluntary work for many, many years:

I was an adult before I began to get involved but cultural and family obligations predispose you to getting more involved in a formal way as part of accepting leadership and responsibility as you get older ...

The busier you are the more you are asked to help out and before you know it is just what you do ... It is hard to say no and so I just keep giving!

For many of the women interviewed volunteer work seemed just an extension of their role in supporting families and communities and responding to need “as a grandmother or as a carer of young children—who else will be there if we stop?” There was not one person who could indicate a clear demarcation between personal and professional giving—“if you work in a senior position you are expected to give back to the community out of hours and for free and if you don’t work for pay, you still work voluntarily!” No one interviewed spoke with concern regarding the length of time of their involvement nor the demands on their time—it was with a sense of pride in community effort and indeed joy that many spoke of their multiple commitments.

#### *Main reasons for volunteering time*

The most frequent response given was duty/ social concern/responsibility. An equal number of people cited reasons related to a combination of personal/family involvement; spiritual beliefs; work experience/to use skills; and experience. The next most frequent responses related to reasons of doing something worthwhile; having social contact and the opportunity to learn and develop new skills.

#### *What do you call your activity in the community?*

The description of people’s voluntary effort was most frequently called “my duty/responsibility” this was followed by those who saw the terms support to organisations; doing what I love to do; participation and survival; self help and taking a leadership/elder role or community service as appropriate descriptors. None listed charity work or helping as the way they would refer to their voluntary effort and many objected strongly and felt this would be offensive and completely the wrong description. Two participants said that they would describe themselves as a volunteer.

#### *Reimbursement of expenses*

Only some 30% of those interviewed received any form of compensation for expenses or reimbursement and this was often a cab voucher or other minor defrayments of costs incurred. All indicated that the costs of participation were a significant barrier to involvement and that many people were out of pocket through their efforts to maintain voluntary commitments.



### *Barriers to volunteering*

Participants were asked whether there was anything that made volunteering difficult for them? The overwhelming response was the costs involved: Money. The fact that voluntary efforts drain already stressed financial circumstances was raised as a significant disincentive—"running a car; using the phone; getting to and from agencies—these all cost and no one minds but sometimes you just have to worry..." Similarly time constraints were mentioned as a constant barrier. These were cited as a particular reason why many Indigenous people were reluctant to volunteer in a structured or formal or non-Indigenous setting as it was not always possible to make a regular commitment and people were reluctant to give a commitment that might not be met because of competing family and community priorities. Interviewees said that they preferred to be able to give as much as they could, when they could and that Indigenous organisations were more flexible and accepting of people's situations in this regard. Mobility was also raised as a barrier with interviewees citing difficulties with transport and transport costs as a problem. The lack of child-care arrangements was also a problem with interviewees saying that unless an environment where they could volunteer was child friendly then it was often difficult to participate because at any time people might have care of siblings; older people; and/or their own kids—"kids are not the problem, but environments that aren't set up for kids are!"

### *Supports for volunteering*

When interviewees were asked what would make their volunteering more enjoyable or easier all spoke of the need to feel valued. Many also cited the need for reimbursement of expenses; the provision of transport or money to cover transport costs—"being able to get there would be a pretty good start." Others cited the importance of a simple "thankyou, a volunteer recognition party, some food or celebration occasionally."

Interviewees were asked to rate the extent to which their volunteer efforts are recognised and valued on a scale of 0 (not valued) through to 10 (highly valued). All rated being recognised as a 7 or above and some 31% rated 9 or higher. This illustrates again the significance of community effort and its centrality to Indigenous organisational and community life. People listed the ways in which organisations would incorporate their views as a highly significant way in which to feel valued for their contributions. Whilst money was seen as a barrier to participation and the reimbursement of costs as important, by far the majority of interviewees spoke of their volunteering as a part of their responsibility and a value they placed on maintaining cultural integrity and hope for future generations.

Being listened to is the way I feel valued - when people respect what I do and what I say then it is all worthwhile; in the organisation where I am volunteering those of us who contribute are included in the policy making and as volunteers that is highly respectful and valuing of our role.

To be listened to, to be welcomed, to be accepted were seen as the most important elements by all interviewees. Those in the younger age group were also keen to gain employment or opportunities within organisations where they had given time and developed experience and skills.

## Summary and discussion

The findings from the interviews and focus groups with indigenous participants can usefully be discussed and analysed around four key themes, namely:

1. The type and nature of volunteering undertaken within respondents' own cultural group and in the wider community;
2. Definitions of, conceptions of, motivation for and attitude toward volunteering;
3. Supports for and barriers against volunteering within each cultural group, and
4. Supports and barriers in the wider community, including government/non-government agencies.

These are expanded upon below.

### *Type of volunteering—within own cultural group and in the wider community*

Results indicated that respondents throughout the research were principally and uniformly involved in volunteer activity within the Indigenous community with only a few indicating any significant involvement in volunteering in the wider community and where this occurred it was in addition to active roles within the Indigenous community. Participants viewed much of the cultural volunteering, heritage and tourism assistance of itself highly significant in adding value to the wider South Australian community. The role of Indigenous voluntary commitment to processes of reconciliation and to the Native Title Management processes were also viewed as benefiting all South Australians.

The range of activities engaged in was extensive, covering many of the ABS volunteer classifications. This was similar to patterns in the wider community, with significant volunteer effort in fields such as community service and welfare, arts and culture, health and child-care. However, findings from this study indicated that there was also an emphasis on areas of grief and loss; alcohol support services, the media and crime prevention and far more informal coalitions of people generating voluntary self help associations and responding to crises in the community (see for example the Grannies Group, Appendix B).

In a finding which is divergent from studies on mainstream volunteering within Australia, socio-demographic factors do not appear to have a distinctive influence on the nature and type of volunteering undertaken in Indigenous communities. Irrespective of socio-demographic factors such as age, gender, education/occupation there appears to be an underlying commitment across the Indigenous community to volunteer time and resources both through informal volunteer support in times of need and also formally in organisational settings. There appears a perception that this is essential to the survival and sound functioning of the community and community agencies and a shared responsibility across socio-economic groups. Those employed or in more powerful and secure positions were expected to give as much if not more back to the community through volunteering their skills and knowledge, however there was evidence that the strong underpinning philosophy of reciprocity and support for family and community was every bit as strong for unemployed/underemployed and educated/uneducated groupings alike. Making a contribution and voluntary sharing of knowledge, labour and time is a "non-negotiable part of one's Aboriginality" as one participant expressed it. This sentiment was common whether employed as a University academic, senior bureaucrat, participating in the CDEP or being a grandmother.

Those people who for reasons of occupation or socio-demographic status did not give back or were not actively engaged in community contribution were admired for their achievements but also perceived with cynicism and negativity as stepping outside of the Indigenous way of doing things—"becoming like the competitive 'every one for themselves' white culture". Of those participating in the study both males and females occupied positions of leadership/management, and both males and females appeared likely to engage in direct service delivery, such as personal care or meals preparation, child care or elderly support. Participants did perceive that "things are changing" and that perhaps younger people did not embody the cultural commitment to reciprocal support as much as older generations. However in each stage of the research there was much anecdotal evidence to the contrary with examples of younger people playing strong roles in community life and in community organisations. This supports the Altman and Taylor (1996) study based on ABS data on volunteering collected through the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey, which shows a greater gender equity and a younger profile for Indigenous volunteering compared to non Indigenous counterparts. Whilst respondents themselves commented that, in their experience, it is mainly older people who volunteer and suggested that this largely centred around the belief that younger people are busy establishing their own lives, less in touch with community issues and possibly more absorbed in the more individualistic approaches of the dominant culture this study's findings indicate that younger people do indeed volunteer although it may be that they do so in the hope of gaining work experience or skills for employment.

#### *Definitions of, concepts of, motivation for and attitude toward volunteering*

Whilst the term volunteering was generally understood, accepted and used in certain contexts by participants, it was seen as problematic for many and, for some, was meaningless. For example, it was felt that volunteering has connotations of formality and is largely associated with structured activities carried out within organisations. Much of the voluntary activity undertaken by respondents was indeed within organisations, but the lines between formal and informal volunteering tended to be blurred as the Indigenous community—cultural and/or kinship significance of many tasks transcended the boundaries of organisational bureaucracy. In relation to the word itself, volunteering historically had no literal translation in the Kurna, Narrendjeri or Pitjatjantjara languages for example and the nearest terms of yerra , Ngapartji, or Yungayungaworta<sup>6</sup> carried far more the connotations of social capital, mutual support, balance, reciprocity or *brotherly love*.

While acceptance of the term volunteering varied, the broad conception of activities covered by questions on volunteering revealed several key qualities, namely: volunteering activities encompassed reciprocity, sharing, giving time and effort to others, and involved a sense of obligation, duty, responsibility, commitment to country or activism for community support.

For the key informants and focus group participants, there was overall consensus that motivation for voluntary activity was fuelled by a deep and proud sense of

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<sup>6</sup> Yunga is the word for 'older brother'. Yungayungaworta is "brother in a more general sense, friend. Applied to men of another amicable tribe". Wortá by itself means behind—so this phrase denotes a meaning close to "brother, friend from behind".

responsibility for country, for culture and for family and community. Secondly was a sense of obligation born of necessity—particularly for those in crisis or facing poverty and despair. The forms of necessity appeared to have changed little over time, however there was some sense that family cohesion, care for elders and youth support were becoming important as organisations established by voluntary community effort were able to focus targeted programs to high need areas exemplified by the work of programs such as the Aboriginal Visitors scheme, the MAPS scheme and proactive media communications organisations such as UmmeWarra in Port Augusta. There was a strong perception that unless the community rallied behind its own services and organisations, developing and supporting its own services, the *mainstream* human services would not meet the cultural and community needs identified.

The findings revealed very strong patterns of volunteering in the Indigenous community and attitudes toward volunteer effort was almost uniformly positive and an object of great pride and accomplishment associated with independence, self determination and survival as well as embodying a deep sense of contribution to the wider community. Many spoke of the efforts of the Indigenous community to support its own and to contribute to State building in economic and social terms through activities such as participation in Native Title management processes and land management and heritage work as a contribution to the whole community and to the future of this State and future generations. There were no negative or angry themes detected and indeed the researchers felt humbled by the uniformly generous and positive characterisation of the contributions made by so many in the face of struggle and much stress on time and resources.

#### *Supports for and barriers against volunteering within each cultural group*

Key informants and members of focus groups generally indicated that there are few supports for volunteering available to Indigenous communities and that by and large their efforts were self-generated. There was evidence that there is strong leadership, inter-organisational co-operation, and the mutual recognition and help afforded to each other in the community where many key people are known and there is much mentoring and encouragement particularly in organisations and through informal networks. There was acknowledgement that some Government funding has been available which has assisted their volunteer effort to some small extent, but not to the unincorporated and informal efforts, which produce so much community support. There was a disturbing lack of knowledge of available volunteer training and support and no clear links with or knowledge of the role of bodies such as Volunteering SA, which was either completely unknown to many informants or seen as not relevant to or not meeting the needs of Indigenous community efforts (this was particularly evident in the country regions—albeit of only limited coverage in this research).

Participants were easily able to identify a number of significant barriers that made volunteering difficult for their communities. The most pressing of these were communication, financial costs, and relationships with government departments and other organisations able to provide support for volunteering. The financial costs of volunteering were cited numerous times during the course of the research. These costs were experienced at individual and organisational levels. For example, for the individual the day-to-day costs (for example petrol, parking fees) often proved if not a disincentive then at least a difficulty, for even if some portion was available as reimbursement (which was not usually the case), then the volunteers—many of

whom were on fixed incomes or benefits—sometimes found themselves being penalised in terms of taxation or in relation to Centrelink or CDEP arrangements. ATSIIC was seen to be not overly keen to encourage structured volunteer work within agencies or communities due to the difficulties of ensuring adequate insurance coverage: this was a major issue for organisations keen to develop more formal volunteer programs.

#### *Supports and barriers in the wider community, including government/non-government agencies.*

For the research participants there was little perceived motivation or support to volunteer outside of the Indigenous community. Those areas which were mentioned centred around forging or extending links with the wider community for specific purposes, such as becoming involved with children's schooling or sporting activity. The needs for volunteer contribution to the maintenance and development of Indigenous community functioning was seen as the paramount need and some respondents queried why there was not more non-Indigenous support to back their work, rather than seeing any reason to contribute to agencies which might tend to exclude their own people through ingrained patterns of service delivery that were either culturally inappropriate or on other occasions quite discriminatory. One focus group member spoke of the difficulty accessing mainstream education services and the continual struggle that Indigenous communities had to educate mainstream agencies on their accountability to all community members—including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It was a clear and conscious choice of the majority of interviewees to maintain volunteer effort in Indigenous contexts where the perceived greatest needs lay. We contend that this is not fully appreciated or indeed recognised in government policy nor by human service organisations and the continual monocultural nature of many mainstream agencies acts as a clear disincentive to more inclusive practices and a clear barrier to more productive diversity in the volunteer sector.

## Non-English speaking background communities

### Stage 1 - key informants interviews

Ten key informants of non-English speaking background were interviewed on a one-to-one basis. Their ethnic backgrounds were: Italian, Vietnamese, Greek, Lithuanian, Lebanese, Chinese, Russian, Filipino, Chinese-Vietnamese and Indian. Their responses are summarised below.

#### *What is/are your role/s within your community/ies?*

All key informants were involved in a range of voluntary activities within a number of ethnic community organisations. Most were also involved in voluntary activity across cultures and in general community organisations. A dominant key informant voluntary role was brokerage, or acting as a bridge between their community (individuals and groups) and the general community. This takes many forms ranging from, for example, settlement assistance for new arrivals to cultural and policy advice to government.

Some key informant volunteering was informal (not done within the auspices of an organisation), ranging, for example, from helping new arrivals fill out forms,

interpreting, to helping entertain senior government foreign dignitaries and their wives.

Two key informants spoke of their volunteering as having developed from their being in small business. It was a natural extension of their business contact with people of their community and the wider community, hence often occasioning cross-cultural contact and voluntary activity.

Some key informants saw themselves playing an important educational role about volunteering in their community, for example teaching people that volunteering is worthwhile and necessary, and explaining their voluntary work.

*Do you call this time you give to others volunteering? What other names do you give this activity?*

Six respondents agreed that they used the term volunteering, whilst the other four used terms such as "servant to the community", "service work", "community work" "doing something for our community", "representing our community" and "helping". Some used several differing terms to describe their work. There was much interest in responding to this question, as key informants tried to think of words that mean volunteering in their language. They all acknowledged that what they do is voluntary work, but those who don't call it that within their community often don't see the term as necessary and/or desirable.

*What type of volunteering occurs in your community?*

A vast number of activities were reported including: sport; religious; building; work with elderly; fundraising; social; performance/entertainment; educational; war veterans; cooking; sewing; multicultural; women's groups; media; government policy; cultural; business/professional; committee work; settlement assistance; organising; transport; teaching; gardening/maintenance; interpreting/translating; office work; health/welfare; brokerage/mediation; legal; political; writing submissions; public speaking; diplomatic; youth work, and library and museum work.

It was noted that the range of voluntary activities done by one person may cover a wide spectrum from intensive one-to-one work to community education (eg from interpreting for an individual to anti-racism education in the wider community).

*Do people in your community call the time they give to others volunteering? What other names do they give it?*

There were multiple responses to this question, with three key informants agreeing that the term volunteering was used, with alternate terms offered including: "doing what they love to do"; "participating"; "helping"; "community service"; "community obligation"; "charity work", and "doing what you must". It was noted that in some communities, some activities are called volunteering (for example, more formal office work, committee work, positions with greater responsibility) while other informal, activities (such as cooking) are not.

*Why do people in your community volunteer?*

This question also attracted multiple responses. According to respondents, the most common motivations for volunteering within their communities were (in descending order of frequency cited): social concern/responsibility; to help others or their community; to use skills/experience; to provide a good future for their children;

concern about the future of their community; social contact; religious beliefs; to gain work experience/reference; and to counter negative comments/attitudes. For respondents in this stage of the research, there was a perception that people volunteer for a range of reasons, but in particular there is a sense of obligation and responsibility to their community and a desire to maintain their language and culture.

*What are the general attitudes to volunteering and volunteers in your community?*

All key informants indicated that volunteering is generally regarded in a positive light amongst people in their communities, with respondents discussing the merits of volunteering in terms of the personal and societal rewards gained when people perform tasks for which they are not paid. The three respondents who said that, in some contexts, volunteering has negative connotations referred to the assumption by some people that those who volunteer do so for personal gain (for example, through their business), that volunteers often feel overworked and taken for granted—particularly regarding increased expectations by governments, whilst volunteering is sometimes considered to have low status. In addition, it was felt that young people generally do not have positive attitudes toward volunteering.

*Do people also volunteer outside of your community eg in general community organisations? In any other ways or places? Why?*

All respondents claimed that members of their cultural group volunteer in wider society (that is, not ethnic-specific organisations), although half of the key informants indicated that such involvement was not extensive. The types of involvement included: Red Cross; Heart Foundation; government; school canteen; SAMEAC; Multicultural Communities Council; aged care; interpreting; sport; Inventors of Australia; helping neighbours; public speaking (Rotary, Apex); nursing homes; and Meals on Wheels.

Motivation for volunteer activity in the wider community included: work experience; to promote their community's culture; to bring understanding of their culture; because their children are involved (for example in school/sport); to break down racism, and to care for the elderly.

A number of key informants reported that people want to volunteer in the general community, but they need a lot of encouragement and a welcoming response, and that they will get involved if they are invited and well organised. Two interesting comments were: "Being a member of a mainstream group is one thing; feeling a part of it and contributing is another." and "It is important to volunteer in the general community to try to break the barriers from the other side".

*What supports exist for people to volunteer within their community? What barriers exist?*

Although four key informants claimed there are no supports for volunteers within their communities, the other six identified varied forms of support, the most commonly-cited including: Government grants; good community leaders/organisers; positive family attitudes; reciprocal relationships, and respect and recognition from their organisation.

All respondents identified barriers to volunteering, the most-often cited being: lack of knowledge regarding applying for grants; language difficulties which restricted

access to outside support; lack of transport or money for transport; volunteers become burnt-out through over-work/over-commitment; inadequate resources to provide support to volunteers, and negative attitudes to volunteering. Whilst these factors were considered to apply mostly within their own communities, other barriers were external to the communities. These included: lack of targeted, cross-culturally sensitive training and support; lack of money to support small volunteer initiatives (for example, for equipment, transport, or targeted training); lack of bilingual trainers; not enough ongoing support from Volunteering SA; not enough recognition of time and money put into volunteering; lack of targeted communication (as one participant stated "government departments don't communicate with ethnic communities"), and inappropriate and unrealistic accountability requirements of funding bodies.

*What supports exist for people to volunteer in the general community? What barriers?*

The key informants identified few supports, which would encourage people from NESB to volunteer in the wider community. Those listed were: active encouragement and networking of NESB community worker; Office of Recreation & Sport (Buddy Program – youth mentors); Department of Health, Quit Smoking (young people, peer educators), and active teachers in schools who organise, welcome and support NESB volunteers.

Far more barriers to volunteer participation in the general community were identified. These included personal issues such as: lack of time; lack of education /awareness lack of knowledge, confidence and skills; lack of English; needs of their own community are too great, and many people of NESB are ashamed to show their ignorance of English and the mainstream lifestyle. Other issues, which could be considered structural rather than personal included: organisational structures and methods don't attract young people; Government workers are too busy to offer opportunities for volunteers; cultural background not valued; lack of skilled cross-cultural leadership/management; poor communication/advertising of opportunities; and no targeting of specific ethnic communities by general organisations.

*How do government (or other) funding arrangements/ policies/ programs impact on volunteers, or people wishing to volunteer in your community?*

The majority of key informants (8) felt that funding arrangements impact negatively on volunteering in their communities (the other two respondents felt there was no impact at all, either positive or negative). Responses are presented here in the form of the comments made by those interviewed.

Too much work for tiny grants. Government funding often has structures and expectations that are incompatible with community based agencies, eg narrow criteria, the 'numbers game' (small communities miss out).

NESB communities often hear of available funding when it is too late to apply.

We need less paper work and more trust and respect for the community organisations that provide such wonderful services.

Government needs to take stock; to take some true responsibility for people who achieve so much for no pay.



The government is ignoring its responsibility to NESB people who contribute so much to the country. Volunteers are a huge resource being grossly undervalued.

We need more government funding to do all we could do.

The government only provides a little, then cuts back, so the volunteers are expected to do it.

All government grants should include funds for volunteers' costs (management, volunteer expenses, training,).

Some key informants stressed the importance of symbolic recognition of NESB volunteers (for example, Australia Day Awards).

## Stage 2 - NESB focus groups

Ten NESB focus groups (with a total of 71 participants) were conducted with people of the following backgrounds: Chinese, Russian, Indian, Polish, German, Dutch, Greek, Italian, Filipino and Vietnamese. Whilst these focus groups encouraged personal reflection and the sharing of experiences, the intention of the researchers was to facilitate discussion around six key areas which had been identified as important foci following analysis of the key informant interviews. To this end, the researchers directed the sessions around those key areas, the results obtained from which appear under the area headings below.

### *Fields of Voluntary Work and Activities*

This initial question was not intended as a key area of study, but was designed to give participants a chance to introduce themselves and to feel more comfortable with the group process—in addition to giving the researchers a broad overview of volunteer activity in the different ethnic communities. Participants mentioned a wide range of fields of involvement and activities within their cultural communities, plus some in the wider general community. These activities are too numerous to list here, but can be usefully grouped using ABS categories (1988, 1995). It was shown that the various cultural groups differed little in their fields of volunteer activity, with most respondents being personally involved in multiple organisations and/or informal volunteering. However, there were differences between groups in terms of the degree of involvement in the wider community, compared to that within their own cultural group. This finding was regarded as significant and will be discussed further below. The majority of voluntary work performed within their own cultural groups was within the following categories: culturally-based education/training; health and welfare; community service; religion; youth development; ethnic affairs; local and state government; arts; media; committee work; counselling/befriending; transport; lobbying/advocacy; interpreting/translating; community festivals; and conducting religious rituals.

In terms of volunteering in the general community, although for most groups this was secondary to their cultural group involvement, there was still a wide range of organisations and activities represented. These included: Neighbourhood Watch; Rotary and Lions clubs; Meals on Wheels; Red Cross; STARRS; University of the Third Age; the Australian Refugee Association and local schools, community health centres, Scouts, coaching sport, caring for the elderly, and informal assistance to

friends and neighbours. There was thus broad representation across diverse spheres of volunteer activity.

*What do you and others of your cultural background call this activity?*

Thirty-seven words or phrases describing the giving of time and effort to others were mentioned. These were: volunteering, duty, necessity, contributing, labour of love, helping someone/ a cause without asking for something back, a sense of community, it's part of life, obligation, community spirit, community effort, being self sufficient, by the people for the people, service to God, religion, bringing the community forward, service, social work, welfare work, mutual support, service to the community, helping, assisting, charity work, your nature – being human, a way of giving, being neighbourly, work without pay, community work, friendly support, out of free will, giving of yourself, my desire, something I enjoy, TY work (thank you work), doing something with all your heart, being a servant to the community. Interesting quotes that illustrate the diversity of ways in which participants thought of the term volunteering include:

I never thought of the work as volunteering.

I've never thought of myself as a volunteer within my community. If I did something with a different community, I'd see myself as a volunteer.

It's a necessity, it's contributing, it's like you're being a family and you don't call that volunteering.

The word volunteering doesn't fit very well in our language. I don't use it very much.

This is something spiritual, in the mind or in the soul—so it's different.

We don't really feel that we're volunteering... you do it out of the goodness of your heart.

The specific words suggested for the concept of volunteering in participants' own languages will be addressed in the analysis section of this report, however, it is noted here that the English word volunteering or a direct translation in their own language of that word, is only used for certain types of giving of time and effort by volunteers of NESB. For example, for some people the word volunteer isn't used with familiar people of their cultural background but they do use it when working more formally (voluntarily) with people not known to them, either of their cultural background or not (For example, OMIA's *Meet & Greet* volunteers and ethnic radio presenters), to stress that the work is unpaid.

*Why do people get involved in these activities?*

The most commonly-cited motivations for volunteer activity within their own communities could usefully be categorised as follows: social concern/responsibility; religious/spiritual beliefs; to do something worthwhile/help others; to promote/maintain culture; necessity (that is, tasks need to be done); duty/obligation; to give something back to community; to be useful/active; and to gain skills/experience.

Motivation to volunteer outside their own cultural groups included: to widen social contacts; to contribute to the general community; be involved in children's lives; to gain work skills/experience. Quotes which illustrate different aspects of motivation included:

It's our upbringing; it automatically happens, like looking after a guest. My father taught me I should consider myself lucky that someone has come to my home. It is my privilege to serve.

You can only get what you give out—it's the Buddhist way.

Karma—for every action you do, there is a reaction.

We are Catholic and it's a part of our religion.

I always treasure my volunteer work more than anything. I get enjoyment out of what I do. It brightens up my life a lot and is an outlet to express my emotions.

I always remember the help I needed when I first arrived in Australia.

You make a contribution to a cause and you learn a lot through doing it, despite all the frustration involved. You learn life skills you wouldn't learn from your family.

We do it because that's our culture, that's what's expected of us, that's what's in us.

We wanted to meet our own people because we were strangers here. It then went on and on.

We are involved so we can be good citizens here and remember where we are from.

To try to preserve something that shows the real face of our country.

You feel you belong to a bigger family – you gain a sense of belonging when otherwise you'd be isolated.

To introduce people to, and promote our culture.

We also raise funds for Australian community when they need help.

We are grateful to this country and there is an obligation to do something back for the people.

To contribute to the general community through our clubs and cultural activities.

Many migrants came after the war where they were united in camps and the only success they had was through working together. They understand the force of working together and that's why you have such a huge impact of migrants in Australia.

We'd like to leave a mark on this country when we die.

### *Attitudes to the word volunteering and to the activity of volunteering*

Attitudes toward volunteering are summarised with some general observations, illustrated by participants' quotes.

#### *Positive attitudes*

There are mostly positive attitudes to volunteering. Generosity and helping are valued.

Volunteers are the bonds of the community. They are important to fill in when the government can't do everything.

Older people see volunteering positively. Many are involved and never thought of getting paid for the work.

I'm there with all my heart to help these people because they need us.

Friendly support of each other is seen as most important.

I've never felt demeaned as a volunteer. They've appreciated all I've done.

#### *Negative attitudes*

Some people think we're 'nuts' for doing something for no money.

Some people see work for no pay as not being work. I get so angry! It puts me off.

Some don't believe we do it for nothing.

Intelligent, educated people say 'Oh, you do something beautiful', but others say 'Oh, you do something for nothing.'

Some people see volunteering as a second rate service, done by people with free time whose ethics and confidentiality might be questionable. If volunteers are regarded as having nothing better to do with their time, they are regarded negatively and if expenses are reimbursed there can also be some suspicion.. In the general community paid workers may see volunteers as lesser workers, or wanting to draw attention to themselves.

Some people are jealous and criticise you. They regard you as having nothing to do or wanting to achieve a high profile.

Among younger people volunteering can be seen as a waste of time, especially if it has nothing to do with your future career. Volunteering should be "done on the side" after career and family.

In some groups traditional gender roles may make it difficult for women to take on leadership positions within or outside their cultural communities. Doing any sort of formal volunteering may be seen as a problem.

The title of volunteer is used cautiously, especially with some recipients of services. If used it can be seen as setting yourself up as superior or drawing attention to yourself—"We want to volunteer quietly."

Volunteers may be seen as being involved in Associations in order to gain political power, "to stir up the community". Furthermore, some people may not want the help of a volunteer because they do not want their personal business known.

#### *Who gets involved in voluntary activities?*

Participants were asked about the age, gender, length of residence, and employment status of volunteers of their cultural background.

#### *Age*

It was the consensus amongst the focus groups that volunteers are mostly older people, although some young people are actively involved in youth clubs and ethnic schools and help with fund-raising and other religious, social and cultural activities with people of their cultural background. More recently arrived groups in particular expressed the view "we're training the next generation so that when we're not there,

they can continue." There was however an understanding that young new arrivals are too busy with their own settlement needs to begin volunteering.

In longer established communities young people were considered to be too busy with families and life style to get involved, although some were involved through their children (for example in ethnic or general schools). Participants claimed that many young people do not have the same needs, commitment or reasons to volunteer, although some young people may volunteer for work experience (especially if unemployed) or to sort out their identity (that is, to establish ties with their cultural group). Others claimed that young people may not want to be identified with their cultural background in the general public. The point was made that some young people are more involved in giving time and effort in the general community, rather than in their cultural groups. It was thought that many young people are influenced by attitudes at their schools and the culture of individualism "where you only give if you get something back".

#### *Gender*

The findings indicated that gender can influence who volunteers and where. Men and women are in general equally involved but may specialise in different areas of activity, for example, men were more likely to be involved in status, leadership/ committee work, whilst the majority of female respondents were involved in some form of direct service provision (for example meals service)—although more men are getting involved in such voluntary service provision. Several focus groups indicated that, for them, types of voluntary activity undertaken were very much dictated by what is deemed appropriate for different sexes.

#### *Length of residence*

Results indicated that there can be a lot of varied voluntary activity in recently arrived communities, especially where their numbers are small and the community has only recently come to Australia. Participants suggested that some new arrivals from European countries may identify more as European than for example German/ Dutch and therefore are less attracted to specific cultural activities. Some new arrivals have education, jobs and better English and therefore "don't have the need to work together." Some may have negative memories of volunteering in their home country (for example under a Communist regime), where volunteering was associated with coercion.

The observation was made that the second generation is more likely to volunteer in the general community because "they think different. They speak proper English." A number of participants claimed that there can be tension for parents who want their children to participate in the life of their cultural community but also want their children to fit in to the general community.

#### *Employment*

Findings indicated that a cross-section of employed, part-time employed and unemployed/retired people engage in volunteering. Participants noted that people who don't have the time to volunteer may give money—"We need funds to run and volunteers to do the work."

A concern was expressed in several focus groups that many volunteers are now retired and on fixed incomes, hence fund-raising has become more difficult—and volunteering less affordable. There was a general consensus that "The busiest people get involved."

In summary, the focus groups indicated that a cross-section of people from their cultural background would be volunteers, but that younger members are under-represented, length of residence is significant in terms of volunteering, and that there is a tendency for types of voluntary activity to be gender-specific.

#### *Supports for volunteers & volunteering within their cultural community*

There were few responses across the Focus Groups concerning supports for volunteering within their community and, of these, there were no detectable trends to allow for categorisation. The factors mentioned in particular were: inter-organisational support (that is, larger community organisations would help smaller ones); small amounts of State/Federal funding; mutual support, appreciation and recognition of effort amongst volunteers; and donations from local businesses to help with the volunteer effort.

#### *Barriers to volunteering within cultural community*

There was more discussion amongst focus group members around barriers to volunteering within their cultural communities. Barriers fell within four main categories, namely financial, demographic, their communities attitudes, and government.

##### *Financial*

There were a variety of financial barriers reported, including:

- ESB organisations appear to attract more government and private money.
- Small groups don't have their own premises, which creates more work when they have to share.
- Many former business people in their communities are now retired, hence there are fewer donations.
- The financial cost of maintaining and cleaning buildings is problematic.
- Smaller clubs are dying due to financial problems.

As one participant put it "How can we keep it all going? We get about 0.25% of our financial needs met by government."

The personal financial cost of volunteering included the lack of reimbursement of expenses and the fear of tax implications of reimbursement of expenses (such as raising taxable income to a higher rate).

##### *Demographic*

The demographic issues raised included:

- The wide geographical dispersion of cultural groups who have integrated well and their independence makes it difficult to provide them with culturally specific services and keep them involved with others of their cultural background as they become frail.
- Many people are unable to continue volunteering due to old age and lack of mobility—"You get too old, too tired, to help out."
- The ageing population and predominance of elderly females means that there are now fewer men now to help with physical work.
- Older participants' incomes are now fixed and low (makes fund-raising difficult).
- Only a few people are left to run a large organisation, resulting in immense pressure.

- Young people may be too busy with work and family responsibilities to replace the older volunteers.
- Young people often don't speak the language, which makes assisting older members difficult.
- Where younger people are involved there can be tension between the needs, values and interests of the young and the old.
- Small communities, with few business people, don't have the power to act as a pressure group.

#### *Attitudes of people from their own cultural background*

Negative attitudes toward volunteering in general and the work performed by volunteers were regarded as a problem by a significant number of focus group participants. These attitudes were categorised around the following themes:

- There can be resistance by family members to women doing certain work.
- Family members may have different views on what help is required and who should provide it. Some will not seek/accept help from outside the family.
- Some do not want their community to know about their problems, so seek volunteer help from elsewhere.
- Some newcomers may have no tradition of volunteering and "expect all work to be paid". They therefore have no interest in volunteering.
- Young people want to be paid or get something out of it.

#### *Government barriers*

Focus group participants were very critical of what they perceived to be governmental and other organisational barriers to volunteering by people from NESB. In particular, the following points were made:

- There is rarely formal government recognition of volunteering by people of NESB.
- The government has little knowledge about all the work being done in the different nationalities' organisations. "They don't want to know."
- There is a lack of appreciation by governments of the distinctive needs of different cultural groups. "The government is extremely deaf."
- There is little knowledge amongst different cultural groups about where to seek government help. "If we can tap the resources, we can do better."
- Government information needs to be sent to volunteers on the ground, not only community leaders (who often don't pass it on).
- Access to help, support services and funding is difficult to obtain.
- Government funding guidelines are too restrictive; they are not tailored to a small cultural group.
- Funding submissions require a degree of English literacy that is beyond many people of NESB.
- Government information is often not in small community languages and therefore people do not know how to access the services.
- Expectations by governments of volunteers are unrealistic. "The more time we give, the more time the government expects us to give. How long is the string?"

Other barriers to volunteering related to a wide range of factors. The most commonly-cited were:

- Language difficulties. "We can't speak English well".
- Poor knowledge of, and access to training.
- Few trainers speak the language – interpreting can be difficult.

- In some small communities there are no formal arrangements for linking potential volunteers with people in need that are not involved in the life of the community. There are also no formal arrangements for people who want to volunteer to offer their services. (For example, the sort of volunteering required by Ethnic Link or HACC.).
- There is a lack of volunteers. The same people are called on again and again. This is especially true in small communities for leadership positions.
- Lack of acknowledgement and appreciation.
- Too much time has to go into fundraising, just to keep functioning.
- Formal requirements (for example insurance and police checks).
- Legal implications and requirements of some situations (for example, OH&S).  
"Volunteering as a spontaneous act is going, it's becoming too structured."

#### *Supports for volunteering in the general community*

As was the case with supports for volunteering within their own cultural communities, when asked to discuss any supports they had experienced if/when volunteering in the general community, participants cited a relatively small number of individual anecdotes, but no clear picture emerged which would allow the results to be grouped into categories for analysis. The supports mentioned were generally of a personal/individual nature, such as: encouragement from friends; opportunity to get away from their own community; opportunity to learn English and build up self-confidence.

#### *Barriers to volunteering in the wider community*

Respondents cited a number of perceived barriers to volunteering in the wider community, some of these being individual/personal whilst others could be viewed as structural. There were three main categories of barriers, namely; language, fear of not being accepted because of their cultural difference; and lack of knowledge of volunteering in general—both as a concept and a process. These three areas are presented below, with general comments from the groups, plus quotes to illustrate their feelings and experiences.

#### *Language (oral and/ or written)*

We need to be accepted even if not fluent English speakers.

Participants stated that many members of their communities were too shy and lacked the confidence to venture into volunteering outside of their cultural group (this was often associated with their lack of fluency in English).

#### *Acceptance*

There was an overall perception that people from different cultural backgrounds (particularly if they are not native English speakers) are not valued as much as those from English speaking backgrounds—"Because I come from NESB, somehow I'm valueless." Participants also spoke of the fear of not being accepted (which had been a reality for many of them) and of unwelcoming attitudes in the wider community.

For many years we couldn't say where we came from. We had to deal with stereotypes of us.

There was a feeling amongst participants that people in wider society have little conception of what it feels like to be a member of a minority group and to face possible discrimination—"It's a big step for us to step out of our organisations and be



involved in the wider community." Another point made was that not only is their culture and language generally de-valued, but so too are their skills. "It would be nice if we were seen as a person with something to offer, rather than someone needing to be taught."

### *Knowledge of volunteering*

There were several key points made in relation to people's knowledge about volunteering:

- Not enough knowledge of what you have to do (for example, meeting procedures).
- Not enough publicity regarding how people from different cultural backgrounds can volunteer in the wider community (for example, "What can I do in Meals on Wheels?")
- People may want to volunteer but don't know how to start.
- Not enough information about volunteering—particularly information in languages other than English.
- Poor communication between ethnic and mainstream organisations.
- Lack of knowledge regarding access to resources (for example, transport)
- The general lack of knowledge about volunteering—particularly for those who come from countries where it is not an accepted or formalised concept.
- Bureaucratic procedures are daunting—particularly as compliance usually involves fluency in English.

Participants also noted that volunteering in the wider community often meant that the cultural expectations of some groups (for example, gender role expectations) are not easily accommodated; hence if people undertake tasks, which may be culturally inappropriate, they risk being judged adversely by their own people. In addition, participants expressed a fear of depleting resources in their own community—particularly as they had already discussed the financial barriers they face through having little government funding. "Why should we participate in the wider community? We need to help ourselves."

### *How could your activities be assisted?*

Participants were asked what assistance from external bodies could enhance their voluntary activities. Many participants had no knowledge of the organisations that may be able to support their activities. They suggested that an increase in funding to the voluntary sector from government or other sources would be necessary in order to achieve the outcomes, which participants indicated as desirable for their organisations. In addition they identified a range of issues that are summarised below.

- Many participants had no knowledge of the peak body, Volunteering SA, although they had been volunteering for a long time. They suggested that information must reach the volunteers on the ground (not just community leaders). "If we get information and publicity, then we can participate."
- Organisations funded to work with the NESB sector could engage in more pro-active outreach work with NESB communities. "They need to reach out to us, instead of us always going to them."
- Volunteering SA could help with recruitment of NESB volunteers from the general community for Aged services/packages run by NESB organisations. (As long as the recruits are sensitive to the interests of the NESB

organisation). NESB organisations cannot recruit enough volunteers from their own ranks.

- There is a necessity for organisations funded to work with the NESB sector to employ bilingual workers, or at least staff and Board members of different cultural backgrounds, to assist in the provision of culturally appropriate training and other services.
- Multicultural training should be made more readily available and provide some training in languages other than English.
- With increased funding the peak body could meet with NESB volunteers and community leaders to explore ways of being useful and talk about volunteering opportunities. There is a need to canvas the communities to find out what they're doing and what volunteering means to them and consult about training and support needs. A package of useful information for NESB groups should be developed.
- The Volunteering SA membership fee was regarded as being too high for small community organisations. Some thought that volunteers and organisations representing volunteers should not have to pay to be a member of Volunteering SA.
- Requirements for membership of the peak body (for example insurance, reimbursement of expenses) could not be met by most small NESB community organisations.
- A recruitment campaign needs to publicise the need for volunteers in a more targeted way. "How do young people find out volunteers are needed if they're not associated with an organisation?"
- Schools could be targeted to influence the attitudes of the young. Young people need to see volunteering as having higher status.
- More use should be made by organisations of the opportunities to advertise on ethnic radio and general radio. Ethnic radio reaches people who are not members of organisations, and who are not getting information from elsewhere.
- Organisations with the potential to assist NESB groups could have a regular column in ethnic newspapers for a small cost, and reach many people (it was pointed out that SA Police already do this).
- Assistance is needed to provide NESB groups with information about volunteering that they can use to promote volunteering in their own language.
- Volunteer awards could include an NESB volunteer category.
- Funding, from State/Federal sources, should be used to organize a free function for all volunteers to attend and be recognised.

### **Government**

Participants felt that certain forms of assistance should be provided directly by governments. In particular, they identified that the Government should:

- Establish a set of minimum standards for volunteering in certain areas (for example, the community visitors scheme), including training requirements, insurance, OH&S policies etc.
- Look at the legal aspects of volunteering and need for legal protection for some volunteers. For example, it was claimed that each year someone threatens court action in response to an ethnic radio broadcast or occupational health and safety issues.
- Provide more information about changes in policies and their effects, of services and funding available and how the system works.

- Provide professional translations of material to be communicated through ethnic media or should pay for the translation of government information on ethnic radio. For example, at present in one group the social worker has to translate Centrelink material, and is then accountable for the translation.
- Pay for time on air for ethnic community radio.
- Provide funding assistance for the maintenance (including rates & taxes) of NESB infrastructure (clubs, halls) established without government assistance, and providing important services to the community.
- Establish a simple process for reimbursing (to a realistic level) volunteers' expenses (transport, parking, phone) in recognition of the huge contribution they make to the community and their costs in doing so. (for example, they could provide bus tickets)
- Amend the taxation system to allow for the reimbursement of volunteers' expenses, without affecting taxable income, or alternatively allow volunteers' costs as a deduction.
- Make its services more accessible: Many groups do not have the skills and contacts necessary to negotiate the 'red tape'.
- Assist NESB groups with collecting up-to-date statistics about their community numbers and needs.
- Teach all groups how to apply for grants and tell people what grants are available. Small NESB groups have difficulty with language and need flexible help.
- Provide insurance cover for all volunteers. Alternatively an affordable, simple insurance scheme should be established by one umbrella organisation.
- Assess and take steps to rectify the impact of the GST on voluntary fund-raising.
- Provide more funding for training of NESB volunteers.
- Appropriately formally recognise the immense contribution of NESB volunteers to the state. Participants suggested annual awards, with certain categories that organisations can nominate their volunteers for. The government should fund the cost of free transport, or provide buses for volunteers, one day a year, to have a thank you picnic day.
- Establish a large umbrella organisation to cover NESB volunteering, including training, policy, support and recognition.
- Fund the translation of training materials into community languages.
- Subsidise the regular updating of First Aid Training for volunteers.

#### *Assistance from other organisations/bodies*

Participants identified a number of areas where assistance could be provided from other organisations. These included:

- Training and trainers could be shared among NESB communities. Training could be in English, common problems could be shared and people could learn from each other. Training and updating of training, was seen as especially needed for formal volunteering, for example during meal preparation in organisation's kitchen. This training needed to include OH&S, Health & Hygiene, safe lifting practices and First Aid. Volunteers want to provide a quality service and in doing so recognise the need for training—but often need training provided in their own language.
- Participants suggested that NESB volunteer training should be accredited and articulated with TAFE courses, especially acknowledging specific multicultural skills. "If you're a trained volunteer, it's something to be proud of, not just something you do in your spare time."

- It was felt that a multicultural umbrella organisation (for example, the Multicultural Communities Council) should take on more coordination of some NESB formal volunteering. Participants argued that the administrative load is too great for small organisations.
- More broadly they felt that NESB volunteering needs to be recognised as a worthwhile mainstream activity and that there needed to be wider promotion of the need for NESB volunteers.

Overall the findings from the focus groups offered useful insights into the issues which arise for people from different cultural backgrounds when they volunteer both within and outside their own cultural communities. These findings highlighted key areas of concern (which will be analysed and discussed below) and also directed the design of the questionnaire for the individual interviews.

### Stage 3 – interviews with volunteers

A total of forty individual interviews were conducted. Twenty interviews were conducted on a face-to-face basis with current volunteers who were recruited via the research team's contacts in the voluntary sector. Another twenty telephone interviews were conducted utilising Volunteering S.A.'s volunteer database. The same research instrument (a semi-structured interview schedule comprising both open and closed questions) was used for all interviews. Interviewees were selected on the basis of their involvement in volunteering outside of their own cultural group. This strategy was adopted in order to give a broader overview than had been obtained via the data from key informants and focus groups, where the results indicated that volunteering for those people centred around their own cultural groups. There was also a deliberate strategy to target people for the individual interviews whose cultural groups had not been represented in the earlier stages of the research. The sample was thus purposive and hence no claims are made in terms of the results being representative of the wider community. The intent of the sampling was to gather information from as wide a source as possible, and to include as many cultural groups as possible within the limitations of the study in order to gain a broad understanding of volunteering from the perspective of the interviewees.

#### *Demographic profile of interviewees*

The forty interviewees comprised 12 males and 28 females and represented 20 different cultural groups. Most (52.5%) had been in residence in Australia for more than 15 years, 15% for 10-14 years, 12.5% for 6-9 years, 7.5% for 3-5 and 12.5% for less than 2 years. Those aged 36-50 years accounted for the largest proportion of respondents (35%), followed by the youngest cohort (15-24 years) at 27.5%—the latter result being counter-intuitive and contrary to claims in the literature regarding young people and volunteering (a finding which will be discussed below). Of the remainder, 25% were aged over 50 years and 12.5% were 25-35 years.

Workforce status included 13 students (10 of whom also worked part-time), 5 part-time and 2 full-time employees, 10 people who were unemployed but not seeking work, 7 unemployed seeking work, and 3 retirees.

#### *General scope of voluntary activity undertaken*

With the exception of one respondent, all interviewees volunteered within the formal sector (that is in organisations)—a finding which reflects the sampling technique.

30% also volunteered in the informal sector, with these activities including meal preparation for others, support and transport, and self-help groups. The majority (87.5%) volunteered only in the wider community—rather than in their own cultural group. Reasons given for choosing to volunteer outside of their own cultural group were varied, with the most commonly cited being the lack of appropriate/desired opportunities within their communities (42.5% of respondents). Other reasons included the lack of opportunity/desire to instigate/maintain contact with own group (17.5%); the wish to engage in the broader Australian way of life in an area they were interested in; to practice English and/or gain skills/experience (25%). Many participants cited multiple reasons for choosing to volunteer outside their community.

The majority (65%) volunteered within the health/welfare sector, 15% in community service, with the remaining 20% involved in areas such as education/training, community action or lobby groups, and community arts/media. The majority (35%) of respondents had been volunteering for less than one year, although this was recognised as a possibly skewed result, given that most of these short-term volunteers were recruited via Volunteering SA. Of the other 65%, 32.5% had been volunteering for between 1 and 4 years, 15% between 5 and 10 years, and 17.5% for ten years or over.

When asked what term they used to describe the type of activities engaged in, the overwhelming majority (85%) said volunteering, other terms being helping and community service.

The local press was cited by most respondents (37.5%) as their source of information about their organisation, followed by word of mouth (30%), or Volunteering SA (27.5%—this reflecting sampling technique). Only 5% had gained information from a government department or local directory.

### *Motivation for volunteering*

Multiple reasons for volunteering were given by interviewees to describe the motivation for their voluntary activity (see Figure 3). The most common were: to gain work experience/develop skills (42%); do something worthwhile/help others (41%); to be active (26.5%); social contact (23%); social concern/responsibility (22.5%). Interestingly, only one respondent was undertaking volunteer work as part of a Centrelink directive, that is, to comply with Mutual Obligations. It was noted that respondents from the younger cohorts were more likely than others to cite gaining work experience and/or work skills (which for many meant gaining fluency in English) as their motivating factor. This will be discussed further below.

**Figure 3. Motivation for volunteering**

To gain work experience/skills	42%
To do something worthwhile/help others	41%
To be active	26.5%
Social contact	23%
Social contact and responsibility	22.5%

NB many participants gave more than one response

### *Reimbursement of expenses*

Only 40% of respondents were able to get financial reimbursement for expenses incurred during their volunteering. This will be discussed below, as non-reimbursement was seen to be a significant problem for a number of volunteers.

### *Barriers to volunteering*

This question attracted multiple responses. The most commonly-cited appear in Figure 4. Other responses not in the Figure included: lack of knowledge and skills to do the job that was expected of the volunteers; organisational dysfunction; performing tasks the volunteers felt should be done by a paid worker; being taken for granted, and emotional strain.

Comments by participants in relation to barriers/difficulties encountered in their volunteering included:

A bit more thanks would be good. More appreciation of what we do.

Getting around. I'm getting older myself. And language. My English is not so good.

It's all out of my own pocket. And transport. I ride a bike and that's difficult at night or in the rain.

Staying motivated when I consider these people should have access to government funded programmes and they have only volunteers to help them.

Too much to be done by too few people.

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**Figure 4. Barriers to volunteering**

Transport	44%
Language	24%
Too few volunteers	22%
Expense	19%
Other commitment	19%
Discrimination	11%

NB many participants cited more than one barrier

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### *Supports for volunteering*

Interviewees were asked how valued they felt as volunteers (on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being 'highly valued' and 1 'not valued at all'). In addition they were asked what made them feel supported and/or valued as volunteers, or what would make them feel more valued.

The majority (36) indicated above level 5 (that is they felt valued), with thirteen of those feeling highly valued (indicating level 8 or above). Only four felt they were not so valued, with one registering a '4' and 3 a '3'.

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**Figure 5. Feeling supported and valued**

Support from coordinator or other staff	68%
Appreciation by those helped	17%
Other volunteers	11%
Being active	20%

NB many participants cited more than one source of support/value

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Figure 5 illustrates that the greatest form of support or feeling valued was from volunteer coordinators or other staff, followed by feeling valued by being active, appreciation from those helped via volunteer activities, and support from other volunteers. Other forms of support not represented in the Figure included: being given lots of duties; personal development, and good communication within organisations. Participants comments illustrated a range of other actions which made them feel valued and supported. Some of these are repeated below.

Being informed about what's going on. Having volunteer meetings and talks by expert people. Having my coordinator ring me up about what a good job I do and making sure I have no problems.

We have volunteer meetings and lunches sometimes, or else if I can't go because of studying then my coordinator meets me for coffee to make sure things are going well.

The coordinator makes us all feel special. She even sends us birthday cards.

And the lady I look after, she's so grateful and makes me feel good and useful.

We all help each other when it's tough. Everyone understands volunteers' work hard here.

For those four respondents who indicated that they did not feel particularly valued and/or supported, greater acceptance of language difficulties, more appreciation for what they do, more community support for volunteering, and increased knowledge to enable them to do a better job were the factors cited which would increase their feelings of being valued.

***Personal benefits/satisfaction gained from volunteering***

The question concerning personal benefits/satisfaction gained from volunteering attracted a range of responses, the most commonly-cited appearing in Figure 6 below.

**Figure 6. Sources of personal satisfaction from volunteering**

Develop new skills	20%
Other personal development	20%
Improve English language skills	18%
Meeting people	18%
helping	16%
being useful	15%

NB many participants cited more than one source of satisfaction

As the Figure demonstrates, learning new skills, personal development, learning/practicing English, meeting people, helping others, and being useful gave respondents the most satisfaction or benefits from their volunteer activity. As will be discussed below these findings are not entirely consistent with those obtained from key informants and focus groups.

Finally, interviewees were asked if they had any general comments they would like to make. Interestingly, many of the responses were of similar nature, which allowed them to be broadly grouped into categories. The most frequently-cited categories were:

- *Volunteering is an effective way of helping yourself and others*  
 You feel good when you've helped someone, even though it's sometimes an effort to find enough time.

It [volunteering] gives me something to do, gets me out and makes me feel useful again.

I'm learning. Learning English and about Australian way of life. I feel I give back to Australia when Australia has been good to me.
- *Volunteering is positive for society in general*  
 If more people volunteered we'd have a better society. It gives you something useful to do instead of sitting around and growing old and watching T.V.

It's a way of having a voice in what happens and also being a part of the a community

It's great to feel you're doing something for someone else. More people should do it. Make the world a better place to be.
- *Volunteers are often taken for granted*  
 Volunteers in general aren't given enough recognition by organisations. We are often regarded as less than paid staff, as if we're not professional or doing an equal job. There's a sense of being resented a lot of the time by paid workers.

You don't get enough appreciation when you're a volunteer. You get taken for granted.
- *Volunteering experience is often diminished by language barriers*  
 I enjoy meeting people. I think they'd be more friendly if my English was better.
- *There is a need for formal recognition of volunteers and their effort*  
 There should be a big way of saying 'thank you'. Not just money or anything, but a big day when volunteers are thanked by the government and the organisations to make us feel they know what we do.

I'd like to see volunteers appreciated. Not to say 'look at me I'm doing good' but to let other people know what we all do and that it makes a difference to the world for all of us.

In summary, the individual interviews demonstrated a pattern that was in many ways different from those obtained from key informants and focus group participants. Although some aspects of this difference can be attributed to the method of sampling, the issues which arose are considered significant by the researchers. The results of all three stages of the research are summarised and discussed below.



## Summary and discussion

The findings from NESB communities may be conveniently discussed and analysed around four key themes discussed below, namely:

1. The type and nature of volunteering undertaken within respondents' own cultural group and in the wider community;
2. Definitions of, conceptions of, motivation for and attitude toward volunteering;
3. Supports for and barriers against volunteering within each cultural group; and
4. Supports and barriers in the wider community, including government/non-government agencies.

Prior to discussion of the results, it is important to acknowledge at this point that the process of recruitment of respondents produced a study sample for the key informants interviews and focus groups, which was biased toward strong cultural affiliation. In order to compensate for this to some degree, respondents for the individual interviews were deliberately selected from the wider community—that is from outside any formal ethnic organisation. It is recognised in the literature that people from some ethnic backgrounds are more likely to develop and maintain strong social and cultural ties, whereas others are more inclined to establish cross-cultural social links (Waters & Crook 1996). As will be demonstrated below, the findings from this research supported these assertions—the outcome of which was highly significant across a range of dimensions including the type of volunteering undertaken and motivation for volunteer activity.

### *Type of volunteering – within own cultural group and in the wider community*

Results indicated that respondents from the key informant interviews and focus groups were principally involved in volunteer activity within their own cultural group, although many indicated that they also volunteered in the wider community.

The range of activities was extensive, covering many of the broad classifications provided on volunteering by the ABS. This was similar to patterns in the wider community, with significant volunteer effort in fields such as sport/recreation and welfare. However, findings from this study indicated that there was also an emphasis in areas such as culturally-specific education (for example language of origin), and religious/cultural maintenance (for example social clubs, cultural festivals and religious rituals).

Consistent with findings from general studies on volunteering within Australia; socio-demographic factors have a distinctive influence on the nature and type of volunteering undertaken. That is, for many volunteers, interest in the field of involvement (for example, sporting or educational) and activities undertaken (for example, coaching/fundraising/personal care etc.) are subject to socio-demographic factors such as age, gender, education or occupation. For example, there is a trend for males to occupy positions of leadership/management, whilst females are more likely to engage in direct service delivery, such as personal care or meals preparation. It was noted that, for key informants and focus groups, the respondents themselves tended to be in the older age cohorts (45 years and over) and also commented that, in their experience, it is mainly older people who volunteer. Reasons offered for this largely centred on the belief that younger people are busy with work, families and establishing their own lives, or are selfish. However, this study's findings indicate

that younger people do indeed volunteer (as evidenced in the individual interviews), but their volunteer activity tends to be in areas different from the older cohorts—for example younger people were more widely represented in the wider community rather than in their own cultural groups, and their motivation for volunteering is also likely to be different. For example there was more focus on volunteering as a means to acquire skills or further interests, rather than being for religious/altruistic reasons (as was the case with many older respondents). This latter point will be elaborated below.

#### *Definitions and conceptions of, motivations for and attitudes toward volunteering*

Whilst the term volunteering was generally understood, accepted and used in certain contexts by key informants and members of the focus groups, it was seen as problematic for many and, for some, was meaningless. For example, it was felt that volunteering has connotations of formality and is largely associated with structured activities carried out within organisations. Much of the voluntary activity undertaken by key informants and focus group participants was indeed within organisations, but the lines between formal and informal volunteering tended to be blurred as the cultural and/or religious significance of many tasks transcended the boundaries of organisational bureaucracy. In relation to the word itself, volunteering historically had no literal translation in the language of some groups, members of which indicated that it has entered their language only after the concept and practice were introduced.

While the range of terms used to describe what may be termed volunteering varied, for example focus groups identified over thirty-seven words or phrases, the broad conception of activities covered by questions on volunteering revealed several key qualities, namely: volunteering activities encompassed helping, giving time and effort to others, and involved a sense of obligation, duty or goodwill.

For key informants and focus group participants, there was overall consensus that motivation for voluntary activity was initially fuelled by a sense of obligation born of necessity, particularly for new arrivals, to assist others from one's country of origin. The forms of necessity have changed over time, for example there is less focus now on assisting new arrivals and much more on providing services for the elderly and on maintaining cultural ties and connections. There were common notions across the various groups of reciprocity, religious significance, social obligation, social solidarity, and altruism which led to viewing helping others as not only a duty but a part of everyday life.

In contrast, the reasons advanced by younger people in the interviews were biased toward gaining skills (noticeably English language proficiency) and work experience. This is also reflected in volunteering patterns for the wider community, with ABS data indicating that the reasons for younger people to become volunteers tend to be work/experience/reference related compared with older age cohorts.

Although the findings revealed very strong patterns of volunteering in the communities included in the study, attitudes toward volunteering were not always positive. Whilst some negative attitudes were linked to perceived barriers to volunteering (to be discussed below), others reflected views held within some groups that people who volunteer are in some way seeking status or personal gain (for example through developing business connections). Such views were refuted by those who actually do volunteer, who claimed that members of their cultural

background holding those views were in fact basing their ideas on cultural beliefs which regard helping others as part of one's duty and should hence be performed quietly and not be formalised. This is significant, as it illustrates the contentions to be discussed further below that, for many culturally diverse communities, volunteering is occurring, but not being recognised (nor supported by the wider community) as, for many reasons, it is not formally structured. In addition, the fact that there was some dissension within groups highlights that, contrary to some beliefs (including those reflected in public policy), all people of a particular cultural background cannot be regarded as homogenous. There are certainly similarities between members of a cultural community, but variations in terms of needs and attitudes within cultures must also be identified, acknowledged and accommodated.

#### *Supports for and barriers against volunteering within each cultural group*

Key informants and members of focus groups generally indicated that there are few supports for volunteering within their respective cultural groups other than those which could be termed self-generated, that is strong leadership, inter-organisational cooperation, and the mutual recognition and help afforded to each other. There was acknowledgement that some Government funding has been available which has assisted their volunteer effort to some small extent.

Conversely, key informants and focus group participants were easily able to identify a number of significant barriers that made volunteering difficult for their communities. The most pressing of these were communication, financial costs, and relationships with government departments and other organisations able to provide support for volunteering. In terms of communication, key problem areas identified were: access to information; provision of culturally/linguistically appropriate communication, and difficulties obtaining qualified translators/interpreters when necessary. The financial costs of volunteering were cited numerous times during the course of the research. These costs were experienced at individual and organisational levels. For example, for the individual the day-to-day costs (for example petrol, parking fees) often proved if not a disincentive then at least a difficulty, for even if some portion was available as reimbursement (which was not usually the case), then the volunteers—many of whom were on fixed incomes or benefits—sometimes found themselves being penalised in terms of taxation.

For organisations, the significant costs of maintaining infrastructure (for example maintenance and cleaning of buildings and facilities) was becoming increasingly problematic, particularly given that much of their fundraising relies on the generosity of group members—many of whom are ageing and now on fixed incomes. Relationships with government and other organisations were described as being often fraught with problems, many of which arose as a result of the communication difficulties outlined above. For example, the lack of cross-cultural workers meant that groups were often unaware of where/how to access/utilise government or other organisational assistance. In addition, the formalities associated with complying with bureaucratic procedures were seen as restrictive and unrealistic for small groups with limited human and material resources.

These barriers and shortcomings often resulted in feelings of isolation, resentment, and a sense of over-work, over-commitment, and being overwhelmed by the volume of work to be done with too few resources.

*Supports and barriers in the wider community, including government/non-government agencies.*

Key informants and focus group participants perceived few supports to volunteer outside of their own cultural group. Those which were mentioned centred around forging or extending links with the wider community for specific purposes, such as becoming involved with children's schooling or sporting activity. For some respondents, volunteering in the wider community became an option as they became more settled in Australia and not only were their group's immediate settlement needs met, but also when their confidence in English language and the ability to adapt to the different cultural practices they encountered increased. It was noted that many respondents felt that their children were more likely to engage in all types of activity, including volunteering, in the wider community—an observation that was supported by the individual volunteers interviewed.

The reticence experienced by some NESB people to participate in the wider community is understandable given the numerous barriers that exist. Principal barriers identified here include language, feelings of acceptance and/or exclusion, and the cultural and organisational practices of the wider (ESB) communities. Whilst these limitations are significant for NESB communities in terms of restricting their participation and development in the wider community and potentially reinforce divisions between ESB and NESB communities, they also represent a tremendous loss of the opportunity to utilise an important community resource, and to enrich the wider community. We contend that this is not fully appreciated or indeed recognised neither in government policy nor by human service organisations.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

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This research project on Indigenous and NESB people's perception and experiences of volunteering revealed significant differences from those of the dominant culture; namely the non-Indigenous and English speaking background community.

The principal findings of the research identified that cultural factors played an important part in the valuing of, and attitudes towards, volunteering. It is clear from the research that conceptions of what constitutes volunteering and its social significance are highly influenced by structures, values and norms present in the cultural milieu.

The English speaking background Australian social construction of volunteering is substantially formatted into a western liberal social and community framework. In the English speaking background context volunteering is largely defined as an activity (effort) freely undertaken which benefits non-family members. That is, volunteering occurs within the public sphere not the private sphere and is premised on free choice, not duty or reciprocity. The Indigenous cultural and community heritage is one underpinned by reciprocity, mutual obligation and deep family and kinship ties which engender communal responsibility and respect. Many of the NESB people surveyed came from cultures where similarly, social and community frameworks did not neatly dissect familial (private sphere), community and social (public sphere) boundaries. Indeed, a voluntaristic frame of social analysis (where individuals may choose the type and level of neighbourhood and community connections and voluntary involvements) was not applicable to either the Indigenous or many NESB people in this study. Here social responsibilities, duties and expectations replace goodwill and benevolence as the drivers of social cohesion and community development. Clearly the western construction of volunteering is one important means of fostering social capital, however, other cultures may have different requirements for social capital formation, either in an expanded conception and practice of volunteering (taking in the extended family), or a different construction of community effort altogether.

Given the above, the research indicates that within NESB and Indigenous communities there is an enormous amount of what, from an English-speaking background perspective, would be termed volunteering or community effort. However, cultural and linguistic differences mean much of that activity is not formalised and hence, within the commonly accepted frames of reference, is generally not acknowledged and fails to attract both material support and wider recognition. It is of vital importance that the concept of volunteering be extended to encompass different interpretations of what it means to give of one's time and effort to others, in order to appreciate the experiences of those who do so outside of mainstream organisations and dominant understandings.

Current definitions of volunteering (for example, ABS) under-value and under-represent the richness of social capital in Australian society. A broader conception of volunteering and community effort will provide important recognition and

understanding of how social capital is actually formed in a contemporary multicultural Australian society.

Despite the fact that the findings indicate there are limited supports and many barriers to volunteering for people from Indigenous and NESB, as indicated above, the volunteer and community effort generated by Indigenous and NESB people is considerable. Nevertheless, these supports need to be extended and barriers removed in order for NESB, Indigenous and English speaking background communities to jointly participate in community strengthening.

Indeed, volunteering and community effort, in a more supportive and inclusive community environment may well prove to be the vehicle through which the ideals of a socially diverse, reconciled and multicultural society may flourish. The challenge now remains for governments, non-Indigenous; mono-cultural mainstream community organisations, Indigenous and NESB communities to foster productive links, share resources, and co-operate to achieve this promise.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Indigenous and Non English Speaking Background:

1. *That the South Australian Government ensure that each portfolio/Government Department establish a volunteer policy which includes recognition of cultural diversity, culturally appropriate service delivery and particular protocols and strategies to support Indigenous and Non English Speaking Background people in their volunteer contribution to the South Australian community.*
2. *That Volunteering SA amend its Constitution to facilitate the participation of Indigenous and Non English Speaking Background representation on their board/governance structures.*
3. *That the South Australian Government support Volunteering SA, as the peak volunteering agency in SA, to develop strategies for culturally inclusive practice involving community consultation and involvement.*
4. *That Volunteering SA develop cross cultural and anti racism workshops/ training for Boards, staff and volunteer workers.*
5. *That the South Australian Government fund the development of training materials which assist community based organisations to develop good practice in volunteer management which is both culturally inclusive and appropriate in relation to services they deliver and areas of volunteer engagement.*
6. *That the SA government, in consultation with Volunteering SA, and in recognition of their debt to volunteers, establish a free or affordable, simply understood and managed insurance cover for all South Australian volunteers, taking into account issues raised in this research.*
7. *That the SA government extend its funding and provision of in kind support in service agreements (through appropriate government departments) to Non English*

*Speaking Background and Indigenous community organisations to enable the establishment and funding of volunteer recruitment, training & management programs for culturally appropriate and culturally managed service delivery throughout South Australia.*

8. *That the SA Government provide a clause in the funding agreements of volunteer involving organisations requiring the provision of reimbursement of volunteer's out of pocket expenses.*
9. *That the SA government / Federal government provide funding and in kind support to assist managers in Non English Speaking Background and Indigenous organisations with the recruitment, training and management of young Indigenous and Non English Speaking Background volunteers.*
10. *That the Volunteering SA, through its Volunteer Referral Service actively encourage people of Indigenous, Non English Speaking Background and where appropriate, people of English Speaking Backgrounds, to consider volunteering within Non English Speaking Background and Indigenous community organisations.*
11. *That the SA government fund an annual "thank-you" day for Indigenous and Non English Speaking Background volunteers. This thank you day to commence in 2001 as the Year of Volunteering.*
12. *That the SA government provide funding for First Aid training, OH&S; Health & Hygiene and safe lifting practices where such knowledge is necessary for volunteers.*
13. *That Volunteering SA, SAMEAC and DOSAA maintain the links forged through this research project by establishing a reference group to: liaise between the organisations; provide information on issues relevant to Indigenous and Non English Speaking Background groups in terms of their voluntary activities and community effort; and to promote a working relationship which could afford benefit to all partners.*
14. *That the SA Government encourage, lobby and/or develop a partnership with the Commonwealth in the Year of Volunteering to support further research into inclusive volunteering practices and into the range, extent and contribution of Indigenous and Non English Speaking Background volunteer effort throughout Australia.*
15. *That Volunteering SA, in consultation with Department of State Aboriginal Affairs, the Attorney General's Department, Department for Human Services and the South Australian Multicultural and Ethnic Affairs Commission develop more culturally sensitive and less intrusive standards to guide community organisations using "police checks" in the volunteer recruitment process, other than where this is of particular relevance to duty of care issues, the nature of the volunteer task/context or other requirements. This policy of standard culturally sensitive practice to be widely promulgated to community bodies.*

### **Recommendations specific to Indigenous volunteering issues**

16. *That Volunteering SA establish active ongoing relationships with Indigenous media (radio, TV and print—notably Umeewarra Media Association; Koori Mail; Land Rights News; Imparja TV)) and promote Volunteering SA and a positive image about Indigenous volunteer effort through Indigenous media.*

17. *That National Aboriginal and Islander Day Observance Committees (NAIDOC) be encouraged to award an annual award that recognises the contributions of Indigenous volunteers.*
18. *That the SA government increase funding to Indigenous media (radio, TV, print) in recognition of its importance in providing information (often government related), social contact, and entertainment for the SA public and in recognition of the major contribution of volunteers to these community services.*
19. *That Volunteering SA, in consultation with DOSAA, petition Centrelink to broaden the definition of volunteering under Mutual Obligations to include informal volunteering in remote areas for Indigenous peoples.*
20. *That the SA Government, through DOSAA, support further research work in rural and remote communities around Indigenous volunteering issues, social capital and the strengthening of families and communities*
21. *That the SA Government through DOSAA and the Commonwealth negotiate clear support arrangements for CDEP participants who may wish to engage in a range of volunteer programs that extend work preparation and expose participants to future career pathways.*

#### **Recommendations specific to non-English speaking background volunteering issues**

22. *That Volunteering SA establishes active ongoing relationships with the ethnic media (radio, TV and print) and promotes Volunteering SA and a positive image of volunteering through the ethnic media.*
23. *That the SA government increase funding to ethnic media (radio, TV, print) in recognition of its importance in providing information (often government related), social contact, and entertainment for the SA public and in recognition of the major contribution of volunteers to these community services.*
24. *That the SA Government, through the Division of Multicultural and Ethnic Affairs, support further research work in rural and remote communities around Indigenous volunteering issues, social capital and the strengthening of families and communities.*
25. *That Volunteering SA, through the Voluntary Work Initiative to actively recruit Non English Speaking Background organisations, which are interested in becoming approved VWI organisations, and to provide policy support and training for their managers.*



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6.b.If Yes, where?.....

6.c. If No, are there any particular reasons why you choose to volunteer in the general community, rather than within your cultural group?

.....

7. Have you ever volunteered in multicultural organisations or events? **Yes/ No**

7.a.If Yes, examples.....

8. For how long have you been volunteering?.....

9. What are the main reasons that you volunteer?

- Social concern/responsibility                      Personal/family involvement                      Social contact
- Spiritual beliefs    To be active    Learn/develop skills
- Gain work experience    Do something worthwhile/help others
- Use skills/experience
- Other.....

10. What do you call your activity in the community?

Volunteering/ Community service/ Community obligation/ Helping/ Support to organisation/ Charity work/ My duty/ Doing what I love to do/ Participating

Other.....

11. Is it possible for you to get reimbursement for your expenses while volunteering (eg transport, parking costs) **Yes/ No**

12. Is there anything that makes volunteering difficult for you? **Yes/ No.**

Comments.....

13. Is there anything that would make your volunteering easier or more enjoyable?

.....

14. On a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 being not valued at all and 10 being highly valued, how would you rate the way in which your volunteer effort is recognized and valued?

.....

(If rate 5 – 10, go to Q.15, if 0-4, go to Q.16)

15. In what ways are you made to feel valued?

.....

16. What would make you feel more valued as a volunteer?

.....

17. What, if any, personal benefits or satisfaction does your volunteer activity provide for you?.....

.....

17. Is there anything else you would like to say about your volunteering?

.....

.....

Thank you for your time. We will keep you informed about the research findings and recommendations.

## APPENDIX B – case studies

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There are numerous stories which could be told which illustrate the enormous amount of volunteer work and community effort contributed—both formally and informally—by people from NESB and Indigenous communities. From this study's findings, we have selected just three examples which illustrate not only the amount of time being freely given by those to whom we spoke, their motivation for and commitment to their volunteering, but also some of the challenges, difficulties and frustrations which they encounter.

### Non English Speaking Background Communities

#### Case study 1.

Members of several of the focus groups participating in the study were highly involved in various capacities with ethnic community radio—namely 5EBI. Their work incorporates many tasks, including behind-the-scenes organisation, researching topics for presentation, production and on-air broadcasting. Participants were extremely enthusiastic about their work, seeing it as a vital link for many people not only as a form of entertainment, but also as a means of maintaining connections with their culture and receiving news and information. The radio programmes were regarded as essential in providing cultural links for people of diverse backgrounds, many of whom are elderly, quite often house-bound, experiencing significant language difficulties and hence are at risk of isolation. This becomes particularly relevant as the migrant population overall ages – the point being made by a number of respondents that elderly people from their communities enjoy listening to news and current affairs pertinent to Australia and also to their country of origin in their own language. Listening to familiar music which had cultural significance was also reported to be a significant part of life for many elderly people, though some participants in the study pointed out that, as presenters, they include contemporary music from their country of origin in order to attract a younger audience. The radio programmes are seen as an important link between the young and old in many communities.

However, the radio programmes are regarded not only as entertainment, but as a very important community service. For example, many presenters collect material such as community announcements from other media sources (such as newspapers), relevant information regarding issues such as health and housing, plus information from Government departments (such as Centrelink), translate it into the relevant language and then transmit it to their audience. Participants expressed concern that this then raises significant issues, as the volunteers at 5EBI are responsible for the translation and this then leads to the question of accountability and could well leave them open to litigation if material is incorrectly translated. The commonly-held view was that it should be a Government responsibility to provide more information already translated by official translators, particularly given the fact that there is a significant financial shortfall between Government subsidies to 5EBI and the actual cost of broadcasting. Each of the 47 different ethnic groups which broadcasts through



the radio station must pay per hour of transmission – the total cost of which is not met by the subsidies. For example, a group which broadcasts for 3 hours per week would incur costs of \$8,000 per year and this amount must be then raised by the group – necessitating even more voluntary work in seeking sponsorships or in direct fundraising. As one respondent said

We are community radio, we rely on people to give donations to keep the radio going. We do service for our people and for the government but we always have to worry about where the money comes from.

This example demonstrates just one way in which the work of volunteers is so important across a range of dimensions, including cultural maintenance, linking people with each other and the wider community, and disseminating information – yet the value of the work done is not adequately recognised in terms of support and funding, leading to feelings of frustration and even anger on the part of volunteers. One man, who has worked in many voluntary capacities (including the radio station) in his community for many years said,

It has to be pointed out to government that we are tired. We can't donate any more like we used to. When I was working I gave money, now I can't because I'm retired. Without government help everything we have now will be gone in 10 to 15 years. Forget it, it won't exist.

## Case study 2

Several members of another focus group were involved (among many other things) in preparing and serving a midday meal for elderly people attending an ethnic-specific day care facility. All of the volunteers had been undertaking this task for many years, with all of them preparing the meal at least 3 days a week, and one of them 5 days a week. They were highly committed to the elderly people at the centre and regarded the service they provide as extremely important as “the old ones like to chat in our language and we do too. And the food, they get what they've had all their lives, what they're used to, what they enjoy.” For most of this particular group of volunteers, English language was very difficult, that being one reason they had chosen this particular type of voluntary work. As one woman said “you don't have to speak the language, you do it with your hands.”

However, language difficulties have in recent times been exacerbated, as in many ways volunteering is becoming more formalised and regulated. The issue for this group are regulations, which require people involved in this type of food preparation to undergo training in occupational health and safety, plus health and hygiene practices. Whilst participants were not averse to such training, they were having great difficulty in obtaining it in their own language. They were faced with the situation of having to try to arrange for a volunteer translator to be present at all training sessions. This was seen as highly problematic, as to rely on a volunteer to translate correctly is not without its own difficulties – but the bigger issue was that participants regarded it as inequitable that they are delivering a very important service, of their own free will, and in order to comply with government directives they are faced with another set of problems around accessing information in their own language.

The situation facing this group is indicative of problems common to many other ethnic communities that find limited or non-existent culturally and linguistically

appropriate training/information/resources severely compromises their ability to carry out their volunteer work and community effort.

### Case study 3

It was important to note that, in addition to volunteering within their own cultural groups, many participants in the study also volunteered—or would like to volunteer, in the wider community. Their motivations for doing so varied, but can be well encapsulated by recording the experiences of one particular group, most members of which had come to Australia as refugees. Whilst reasons given for volunteering within their own community tended to reflect strongly-held religious or spiritual beliefs, plus very clear notions of reciprocity, and the sense of fulfilling needs (particularly in terms of providing services which would not otherwise be forthcoming—such as ethnic-specific aged care/meals) motivational factors for wider community involvement had a quite different focus.

There was still a strong sense of reciprocity, but this was expressed in terms of 'giving back' to Australia. As one woman said

Australia has been good to us. We have a good life now and we want to help and show we are glad to be here." While another said " I came here and received a lot, now I want to do something, now is my turn to contribute.

Another interesting reason given was to combat racial stereotypes "I feel good when Australians see me and think 'she comes from ... but she's helping in our centre'." In similar vein, the perception of racism inherent in some of Pauline Hanson's comments concerning people from certain NESB groups prompted some of those interviewed to extend their volunteering beyond their own communities as a way of breaking down racial barriers. "Australians need to know what we are like, to know we're not different in those ways. We all want Australia to be a good place." The point was made that the skills and experiences of people from diverse backgrounds can well be used as a bridge between communities. The group discussed the merits of sharing their culture with others as a means of enriching society as a whole.

However, there was much discussion about how to actually 'break in' to wider society involvement. One member of the group said being invited to participate by someone you already know is the ideal scenario, but that is often very difficult in that this presupposes prior connections anyway. The comment was made "I often want to [get involved in volunteering in the wider community] but don't know how to start." Language was seen as a big problem "I tried at the school canteen but the kids laughed at my English." " I want to be involved. My English is better now. When I first came, I went to meetings and I couldn't understand what was going on. I was scared to ask questions." There were other interesting issues for this group, the female members of which – in common with many other NESB groups – are not encouraged to be assertive as to be so is often regarded as culturally inappropriate. Hence wider community involvement, although desired by the group members we spoke to, is often difficult for a variety of reasons.

This particular case study highlights the need for cultural awareness and sensitivity when encouraging people from NESB to participate in volunteering beyond their own communities, whilst recognising that such involvement is very often seen as highly desirable by people from diverse backgrounds – who regard such cross-cultural exchanges as potentially mutually beneficial.

## Case studies: Indigenous communities

### *Case study 1.* The Adelaide Grannies Group

The Grannies Group, as the name implies, is a group of Aboriginal women resident in the Adelaide metropolitan area who meet informally on a regular basis to act as support for families experiencing problems within their families. These women came together over two years ago as a result of the high numbers of young Aboriginal people losing their lives as a consequence of drug overdose and suicide in some cases. A number of community meetings were held so that the Aboriginal community could discuss these problems, share grief and to look for support and solutions that might overcome these problems

Many of those attending the meetings are grandparents; all are parents, who have had past experiences in trying to assist their own children overcome substance abuse problems. An important reason for their participation was to allow them to share their experiences and to look at ways in which the problems within the Adelaide Aboriginal community might be overcome.

The support and camaraderie that is shown within the group for others who share similar problems is inspirational and is community 'grass-roots' action at its very best. Being involved in the groups helps many of the group to acquire the skills, knowledge and support which helps them to cope with very difficult circumstances and plays a crucial role in building and strengthening families. From this we have a stronger and more resilient community.

The Grannies group is not an incorporated group that receives funding of any note; they are a group of Aboriginal elders that welcome all into their homes for meetings. They help each other out in transporting members of the group to meetings, as well as assisting in food preparation and refreshments for meetings. Each member makes a contribution of some sort if they can. All assist in the provision of services in a totally voluntary capacity, and this makes the Aboriginal community stronger as we are helping ourselves. The Group are role-models for the younger members of the Adelaide Aboriginal community in a culturally appropriate manner as the Grannies group reinforce the values and spirit that has made the Aboriginal community strong over the course of history.

The benefits of the voluntary efforts and contributions made by the Grannies Group, however, has benefits that reach out beyond the Aboriginal community. The work of the Grannies group is also aimed at preventing young Aboriginal people entering into the Criminal Justice System by encouraging respect among the young people and the importance of education to our young.

The Grannies Group are successful and well-respected Elders among the Adelaide Aboriginal community for the compassion and leadership they show the community. They show how Aboriginal people can sort our problems out by supporting each other when times are difficult. For this reason they could be regarded as a model for the broader community as we grapple with a soaring drug problem in our communities.

## **Case study 2. Umeewarra Media Association**

Umeewarra is an Indigenous media organisation located in Port Augusta in the northern region of South Australia, and provides media services to the broader regional community. Umeewarra Media Association was established many years ago by volunteers and continues to be managed by an Indigenous committee that still maintain their commitment to the organisation in a voluntary capacity. Volunteers have, and continue to play, a vital role in the management and service-delivery of the association.

Perhaps the main programme offered by Umeewarra is the radio show that is broadcast throughout the region and is a valuable resource to the whole community by way of entertainment and community service. The radio programme operates for 18 hours per day. A significant feature of this being that the on-air announcers are mostly voluntary contributors who give large amounts of time to the organisation. The volunteers are almost entirely Indigenous people who are highly motivated and committed to the reaching of Umeewarra's goals and this is done in the spirit of reconciliation.

As the Director Mr Vince Couthard puts it, "Umeewarra could not survive without the hard work of it's volunteers " as all of them contribute an enormous amount of time to the association. The high levels of training of volunteers within Umeewarra provides them with the skills to secure employment where vacancies occur within the organisation and within the media network. The technical training and knowledge acquired by volunteers at Umeewarra Media is of a very high standard.

Another ethos supported by Umeewarra is that they are putting something back into the community by way of communication and information and this crosses any racial boundaries there may be as the radio show is available for all. If anything it brings the community closer. An interesting aspect of the training for volunteers occurring through Umeewarra is that non Indigenous people (including a student from Sydney) are keen to be involved as volunteers and trainees as there are nationally well recognised tangible employment gains to be made for those who have worked as volunteers with the station. The broadcasting service also reaches the broader non Indigenous community with information and entertainment and as such is a model of an Indigenous organisation with a formal volunteer program which provides a service that contributes not only to public media nationally but also to crime prevention; reconciliation; enterprise and skills development and social change at the local community level.

## **Case study 3. Individual volunteer in the broader community**

Throughout the research project there were a number of strong trends or themes that emerged concerning Indigenous volunteering. One such trend is that Indigenous people volunteer within their own community. This individual case study was selected as it provides a contrast to the populist views concerning Indigenous volunteering and demonstrates the contributions that can be made by Indigenous persons within a broader community setting.

During the volunteer interview phase of the project a prolific volunteer was interviewed and it was discovered that almost all of their volunteer effort and time

had been put into non-Indigenous organisations and clubs. Some of these clubs included sporting associations in the sports of basketball, football and canoeing, indeed our Indigenous volunteer is the Captain of a local canoeing club which has no Indigenous perspective to speak of.

There are many and varied areas to which our individual volunteer involves himself in that have benefits for the Indigenous community however, such as:

- The Law Society of South Australia (committee involvement)
- Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation
- SA Fishing Advisory Committee
- Marine Taskforce
- Volunteer in the 2000 Sydney Olympics.

Having a strong feeling of community spirit in its broadest sense is the motivation behind the high levels of non-Indigenous volunteering performed and this has many positive effects for the Indigenous community. This case study is clearly a contrast to most other instances of Indigenous volunteering where our volunteer contributes directly to the broader community but with indirect benefits to the Indigenous community by way of reconciliation and positive role-modelling.

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