

## The Changing Face of Volunteering

By Margaret Allison

Baby boomers<sup>1</sup> are changing the face of volunteering in the 21st century and organisations that currently rely on volunteers may need to change their recruitment strategies if they want to attract volunteers of the future.

These are some of the findings of a research report commissioned by the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care (DADHC) during the International Year of Volunteers. Based on a series of focus groups held in city and regional areas of New South Wales (NSW) during mid 2001, the research report, *Older People and Volunteering*, was released at the annual Premiers Forum on Ageing in October 2001.

The research focused on how volunteering is changing for older people and in particular how volunteering will fit into the lives of Australia's latest "older" generation — the Baby Boomers. Historically, people volunteered because they were motivated by their desire to "give back" to the community. The DADHC-commissioned research revealed that although this motivation still plays a part, it will not be the baby-boomers overriding reason for volunteering.

Baby boomers when they retire want fulfillment and to remain active and productive. They want a fulfilling experience that fits with their lifestyle and interests.

The research identified four main characteristics of the new volunteers — characteristics that reflect and summarise peoples' motivation to volunteer.

- **Nurturers** are mostly women who are motivated by a desire to make emotional

connections with people who are vulnerable in society. Nurturers are often found in roles such as community visitors in nursing homes, or working with children with a disability.

- **Adventurers** are a key growth segment, under-utilised at present, are not particularly well targeted. Adventurers are mostly women (but some men) who are looking for new experiences and stimulation as they plan their post-employment and post-child rearing years.
- **Socialisers** are motivated by a desire for social interaction. Many Socialisers are found in roles such as Bushfire Brigade, State Emergency Services and committee work. For them, volunteering is all about teamwork, mateship and a sense of belonging with the group.
- **Workers** are among the older Baby Boomers and are mostly men. Their key motivation is to achieve a sense of self-worth by being useful and productive. They are looking for opportunities to use their existing skills in a new setting. Typical Worker roles include people offering handyman or trades-based services to organisations and committee work.

### WHAT DOES THIS RESEARCH MEAN FOR ORGANISATIONS?

Most current promotional material for volunteering opportunities focus on appealing to people's sense of civic duty or desire to make a difference, rather than on how the volunteering experience can be personally fulfilling.

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The DADHC-commissioned research contains recommended recruitment strategies to target the most suitable volunteer based on the four key segments. Our research also suggests systems and structures to ensure that volunteers are recognised by their organisations and in turn feel positive and confident about the work they are doing.

### RECRUITING THE NEW FACE OF VOLUNTEERING

- **Nurturers:** The key needs for Nurturers are emotional support and positive reinforcement for the difficult job they do. The main barrier for them is their concerns about their ability to deal with unexpected emotions and situations that they might encounter through volunteering.
- **Adventurers:** Organisations wishing to target Adventurers must provide them with a constantly challenging volunteering experience. Adventurers do not like being asked to do tasks that don't challenge them. They are particularly sensitive to being used and because they choose challenging roles, are paradoxically wary of "not being able to do the job".
- **Socialisers:** To attract and maintain Socialisers, organisations must ensure they provide an enjoyable group experience. Barriers to volunteering for Socialisers include friends dropping out or loss of group cohesion and the volunteer activity becoming too serious without the counterbalance of social interaction.
- **Workers:** Organisations wishing to target Workers must ensure that they publicly recognise them for the valuable and unique skills they bring to the volunteer role. If possible, offer them a degree of control and freedom over their volunteering experience. There are a number of potential barriers for Workers including lack of respect for their skills and contribution, being asked to do things "anyone could do" and loss of freedom to manage their own tasks.

### RECRUITMENT, SYSTEMS AND STRUCTURES, AND RECOGNITION

According to *Older People and Volunteering* these three areas can hold the key to successful recruitment and growth of volunteers for organisations.

The DADHC-commissioned research recommends a range of strategies covering recruitment advertising and promotion, entry formalities and volunteer recognition programs.

The *Older people and Volunteering* research will be used by DADHC over the longer term to assist in policy development for sectors that rely on volunteers, as well as in the development of strategies to recruit and maintain older people as volunteers.

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### ENDNOTES

We are happy to share this research with you. To obtain a copy please contact DADHC's Office for Ageing on (02) 8270 2211. Copy of the research may be obtained at: <http://www.communitybuilders.nsw.gov.au/builder/volunteering/babyboomers.html>

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<sup>1</sup> Bernard Salt, author of *The Big Shift: Welcome to the Third Culture* (a report on the impact of population trends on Australian culture: Hardie Grant Publishing, Melbourne 2001), defines the Baby Boomer generation as being born between 1946 and 1961