

YOUTH VOLUNTEERING



Increasing Engagement and Participation

Policy Paper

Who Are We?

Founded in early 2008, **Left Right Think-Tank** is Australia's first independent and non-partisan think-tank of young minds.

Our mission is to involve young people in public policy.

Our vision is for a society that seeks and embraces the ideas of young people.

We are:

- Independent of influence
- Politically non-partisan
- Young people aged 15-24
- Not-for-profit
- Passionate about ideas
- Committed to inclusive debate

We work to achieve our mission through:

- Developing policy based on sound research across the public policy spectrum.
- Fostering discussion on the greatest challenges of our generation throughout the community.
- Advocating policy ideals with various stakeholders and across government; promoting a new genre of thinking in the public policy cycle.
- Educating young Australians through various events and programs, motivating individuals to harness their potential in contributing to public policy debates.
- Empowering the next generation of leaders by providing them with unique opportunities for development.

Left Right Think Tank's Queensland office was established in August 2009.

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Abstract

This document constitutes Left Right Think Tank's initial findings and recommendations into improving the level of engagement and participation of young people in volunteering in Australia. This policy paper outlines three key areas which we believe require the immediate attention of government, and the broader community. The three identified areas for improvement are all inter-linked and require a coordinated approach in order to achieve the greatest impact. The implementation of our three recommendations will lead to a greater understanding of the importance and impact of youth volunteering and help to changing young people's negative perceptions of engaging in their communities through volunteering.

Recommendations

- Invest more heavily in research initiatives aimed at better understanding the impact, value and diversity of the "volunteering community" with an emphasis on the factors which limit the involvement of marginalised groups, such as ethnic and migrant communities, in volunteering.
- The Australian Federal Government should publicly encourage and identify methods to incentivise the embedding of volunteering programs, akin to those in operation at Macquarie University, across all undergraduate degrees in Australian Universities
- Foster partnerships and formal linkages between the private and not-for-profit sectors with a view to improving skills development opportunities through volunteering.

This policy paper was written entirely by young volunteers and Left Right hopes this serves as a testament to the capacity and capability of young people and the changes they can be part of as volunteers.

Table of Contents

Introduction: Why Youth Volunteering?	5
The Issue	6
Scope: Who are Young Volunteers?	7
Recommendation 1:	8
Incentives: Getting Involved	9
Option 1: Youth Allowance.....	10
Option 2: HECS – HELP-FEE Support	11
Option 3: Embedded Undergraduate Volunteering	13
<i>Case Study: The Macquarie Model</i>	13
Recommendation 2	15
Skills Development: Learning from Doing	16
The case for Skills Development.....	17
<i>Case study: NAB’s Skilled Volunteering Program</i>	18
Recommendation 3:	19
Conclusion	20

Introduction: Why Youth Volunteering?

The Federal Government's intended release of the National Volunteering Strategy (NVS) marks 2011 as a watershed year for reform of the volunteering sector in Australia.¹ Issues facing young volunteers have long been ignored in public policy at Local, State and Federal levels of Government and there are early indications that this latest strategy will not adequately address issues relating to youth participation in volunteering.

Significant evidence indicates that early exposure to volunteering opportunities fosters a lifelong culture of volunteering and as such, it is crucial that more focus be placed on significantly shifting prevailing attitudes towards youth volunteering.² The benefits of creating a culture that embraces volunteering goes beyond the impact of a single person's efforts. Participating in volunteering efforts reaffirms the notion that people can work together for the common good and develops a sense of community and belonging between volunteers and the communities, individuals and groups they serve.

For participation rates in volunteering to continue to increase, significant structural reforms are required to improve the experiences of young people who volunteer. Implementing processes that improve attitudes and opinions will hopefully discourage and prevent typecasting younger generations as lazy and apathetic towards community participation. This policy paper will explore several policy options that aim to boost youth participation in volunteering and provide a constructive critique of the policy landscape.

In April 2011, Left Right Think-Tank undertook a review of the literature and published policies regarding youth volunteering, including research from peak bodies and government departments as well as the studies and the expert opinions of academics in the field. The subsequent *Youth Participation in Volunteering Policy Scan* presented the findings of Left Right's research along with four key focus questions that provide a road map for future research:

- *How do we minimise the social costs associated with volunteering?*
- *How do we remove the barriers to participating in volunteering for young people?*
- *How do we improve the experiences of young volunteers?*
- *How should government facilitate greater volunteering opportunities for young people?*

¹ See the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations' Social Inclusion website for further details. <<http://www.socialinclusion.gov.au/Pages/default.aspx>>

An initial consultation paper can also be found at:

<http://www.dpmc.gov.au/publications/national_volunteering/docs/consultation_report-national_volunteering_strategy.pdf>

² Holdsworth, c. 2010. Why volunteer? Understanding motivations for student volunteering. *British journal of educational studies*, 58, 421-437.

Handy, F. Cnaan, R. A., Hustinx, L., Kang, C., Brudney, J. L., Haski-Leventhal, D., Holmes, K., Meijs, L. C. P. M., Pessi, A. B. & Ranade, B. 2010. A cross-cultural examination of student volunteering: is it all about Resume building? *Nonprofit and voluntary sector quarterly*, 39, 498.

These questions are addressed in greater detail throughout this policy and recommendations are made to help overcome these identified challenges. We see this policy paper as a starting point for further detailed policy development. Left Right has identified two key areas for improvement in involving greater numbers of young people in meaningful volunteering activities: incentives for participation and enhancing skills development opportunities for volunteers. Left Right hopes that in focusing on these areas, we can begin a conversation which will reshape the way that youth volunteering is valued and supported in Australia.

The Issue

Our research indicates that young people are motivated to volunteer for a broad variety of factors that go beyond the altruistic impulse.³ They are also eager to develop skills which will be of use to them in a professional and personal context in later years. The typecasting of Generation Y as lazy and apathetic is symptomatic of the much talked-about disconnect between young people and their elders. Young people are eager to find opportunities to give back to their communities through initiatives that are fun, exciting, meaningful and result in a measurable positive impact. Our research indicates a stigma within the community that many traditional forms of volunteering are 'uncool'.

Similarly, young people associate the act of volunteering with a set of social costs and barriers which diminish the potential benefits they would receive from volunteering. While not always explicit, these costs, such as time-costs, out of pocket expenses or loss of potential income, act as a deterrent to potential volunteers. At the same time, potential volunteers sometimes fail to fully appreciate the tangible and intangible benefits that are derived from volunteering. The unrecognised benefits of volunteering in shaping a volunteer's professional, personal and social skills and broadening their personal horizons and connection to their communities is something which Left Right wishes to shine a light on.

Organisations such as Youth Tree have made great advances in redefining traditional assumptions of volunteering and highlighting the positive experience of volunteers who participate in their initiatives.⁴ They have taken steps to deconstruct the process of volunteering and allow their volunteers to participate in mini-projects or volunteering activities like flash-mobs, the act of spontaneously gathering in a public place for a particular cause or awareness-raising activity. This recalibration of what it means to volunteer and what a volunteer should expect to get out of their contribution, highlights the divergence between traditional organisations, such as the Red Cross, and more youth-orientated organisations such as the Australian Youth Climate Coalition and Youth Tree.

For further exploration and research into the key motivators and demographics of young volunteers, refer to the accompanying *Policy Scan*.

³ Davis Smith, J. 1999, 'Poor Marketing or the Decline of Altruism? Young people and volunteering in the United Kingdom', International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing, Vol. 4, No. 4, p1–2.

⁴ Youth Tree. 2011. *What We Do* [Online]. Available: <<http://youthtree.org.au/about-us/what-we-do/>>

Scope: Who are Young Volunteers?

Young people are an exceptionally diverse segment of the volunteering population. With a wide range of cultural backgrounds, life experiences and levels of education, identifying what the 'typical' young volunteer looks like is a problematic endeavour. The accompanying *Policy Scan* highlights the differing rates of volunteering by young people and the breakdown between various socio-economic groups. ABS figures note that 28% of young people aged 18-24 participate in some form of volunteering. This figure has increased substantially from 15% in 1995.⁵ However the main area for this increase has come as a result of predominately University students taking up volunteer roles. University students from middle to low socio-economic backgrounds are disproportionately more likely to volunteer than fellow young people⁶

Young people at university are more likely to have spare time to engage in voluntary work and are more likely than apprentices or those working fulltime to seek opportunities that build their skills and competencies for future employment, making them more likely to participate in volunteering.⁷ Those working fulltime or studying independently have limited available time and diminished flexibility to engage in volunteering activities.

Students are perhaps the easiest demographic of volunteers to target in order to increase the participation of young people in volunteering. The potential to harness the resources of an easily identifiable, easily locatable group of tertiary students and provide a ready access point for the promotion and distribution of information of volunteering opportunities is perhaps under-valued. Universities also provide an established culture and community that can be utilised to boost what are already high rates of volunteering amongst students. Left Right has focused on this demographic of volunteers, as we believe that there is capacity for levels of volunteering amongst university students to substantially increase.

Much of the research conducted into youth volunteering has focused particularly on those who are educated or are currently students and those who are already involved with volunteer organisations. Left Right's research has indicated that several key demographics are underrepresented in both the existing literature on youth volunteering and in volunteering data. Data indicates that groups such as ethnic communities and those who speak a language other than English at home are less likely to engage in voluntary work.⁸ Evidence indicates young people belonging to

⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006a, How Australians Use Their Time.

<<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/4153.0Main%20Features22006?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=4153.0&issue=2006&num=&view>>

⁶ Brown, K., C. Lipsig-Mumme and G. Zajdow (2003), Active Citizenship and the Secondary School Experience: Community Participation Rates of Australian Youth, Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth Research, Report Number 32, Australian Council for Educational Research, Camberwell, Victoria, <http://www.acer.edu.au/documents/LSAY_Isay32.pdf>.

⁷ Ferrier, F., Roos, I. & Long, M. 2004, Passions, People and Appreciation: Making Volunteering Work for Young People. National Youth Affairs Research Scheme, pgs 31-32.

<http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/volunteers/pubs/PassionsPeopleAppreciation/Documents/passions_people.pdf>

Adams, N. & Picone, A. 2009. Generation Y Volunteer: an exploration into engaging young people in HACC-funded volunteer involving organisations. *Volunteering Tasmania*.

⁸ Muir, K., Mullan, K., Powell, A., Flaxman, S., Thompson, D. & Griffiths, M. 2009. *State of Australia's young people: a report on the social, economic, health and family lives of young people*. Department Education Employment And Workplace Reform: Office Of Youth (ed.). Canberra. Available at

these groups do not take up voluntary work at the rate of their peers. Substantive research into reasons for this phenomenon is lacking.

Similarly, there is a clear lack of research completed on the impact of volunteering in regional communities. While ABS statistics highlight that regional Australians volunteer more than their Metropolitan counterparts, little has been done to measure the impact such activities have had on regional communities.

Without more substantial qualitative and quantitative data on the volunteering trends of young people, Left Right can not make informed and appropriate recommendations to increase youth volunteering with respect to these demographics. According to our research, much of the reasoning and justification for policy proposals with regards to youth volunteering have been made without substantive research into the habits and attitudes of marginalised groups.

Recommendation 1:

Left Right strongly believes that understanding the volunteering habits of young people not currently enrolled as students are as important as those who attend University or TAFE as well as those who belong to minorities or do not speak English as a first language. Boosting levels of participation in volunteering within these identified groups of young people is key to redefining perceptions of volunteering in Australia and boosting levels of youth participation.

Volunteering habits are formed at an early age and should not be limited to those of high socio-economic circumstances. Volunteering provides a sense of belonging and community that serves as a bridge between those young people who are engaged in fulltime work and those who study. It also facilitates cultural awareness and understanding between minority groups. These are areas that warrant further research and policy development in the future.

Left Right advocates the allocation of greater funding to peak bodies and research groups to profile and analyse attitudes to volunteering within ethnic communities, lower socio-economic communities and those undertaking fulltime employment or apprenticeships. In better understanding these groups of potential volunteers, volunteer organisations will have a wealth of information at their disposal to better enable them to engage more young people in volunteering.

<<http://www.deewr.gov.au/Youth/OfficeForYouth/Documents/StateofYoungPeople.pdf>>

Incentives: Getting Involved

Arguably the most commonly suggested proposition to boost youth participation in volunteering is through incentive mechanisms. These proposals, with their roots firmly grounded in economic theory, hold that an incentive can be effective in helping young people take the first step into volunteering. However this is not a universally agreed strategy to boost levels of volunteerism. Assoc. Prof. Melanie Oppenheimer of the University of New England in New South Wales posits that the argument for providing people with incentives or financial benefits for their efforts goes against the very ethos of volunteering.⁹ For others such as Prof. Gail Whitman the use of an incentive to overcome initial reluctance to volunteer enables young people to challenge the perceived social costs of volunteering and allows new volunteers to focus on the experience and benefits of volunteering rather than the personal sacrifice made.

Evidence is emerging from reports such as the ABS's social trends survey that suggest those engaged in volunteering early in life who have an initial positive experience are more likely to become "life-long volunteers".¹⁰ In this context, an incentive for participation in volunteering can be viewed as the catalyst that helps young people in overcoming personal doubts around participation and leading to the reshaping of perceptions of the value of volunteering once they begin volunteering.

With the current generation of young people typically typecast as requiring immediate gratification and displaying apathy and self-centredness, incentives provide an immediate enticement to volunteer.¹¹ The work of Huntley has gone some way in dismissing these notions of an apathetic generation, however public perception is still very much geared towards these stereotypes.¹² Reports such as the *Engaging Young People in Volunteering: What works in Tasmania?* contribute to a deconstruction of this stereotype.¹³

If incentives are an effective way to introduce a young person to the altruistic and personal benefits of volunteering, then how should we best organise and facilitate these incentives?

⁹ Oppenheimer, M. *An Idea that Serves Nobody*. The Australian, 14 May 2008. Available at: <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/higher-education/opinion-analysis/an-idea-that-serves-nobody/story-e6frgcko-1111116326988>

¹⁰ Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006a, How Australians Use Their Time.
<<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mediareleasesbytitle/C1866BB6582046A5CA2573F5001959CF?>>
Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006b, General Social Survey: Summary of Findings.
<<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/C6BF68E57D3A308CCA256E21007686F8?>>

¹¹ Wajs-Chaczko, E. (2008). Gen Y and emergency management: How do we engage generation Y in the emergency management sector? The Australian Journal of Emergency Management, 23(3), 58 – 61

¹² HUNTLEY, R. 2006. *The world according to Y: Inside the new adult generation*, Allen & Unwin Academic.

¹³ Moffatt, L. 2011. Engaging young people in volunteering: what works in Tasmania? *Volunteering Tasmania*. Available at <<http://volunteeringtas.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/Generation-Y-Volunteering-Report.pdf>>

Option 1: Youth Allowance

There have been several proposed incentive scheme models that have featured in the public policy debate. These include changes to Youth Allowance payments to reward volunteers and a HECS/HELP-FEE debt reduction scheme. The earlier model looks to reward young people for their volunteering efforts through either increasing Youth Allowance payments or by providing an alternative measure of independence in the Youth Allowance application process.

Youth Allowance is an income-support payment provided by Centrelink for those studying at a tertiary level or undertaking certain pre-approved apprenticeships. It is available to 16-24 year olds and is also available for 16-20 year olds seeking employment through other prescribed activities. Provision of such an allowance is dependent on the applicant fulfilling an independence criterion, which can be met in a number of ways, or through a means test if they are still dependent on their parents. The most common method of proving independence is through completing 18 months full-time equivalent employment or earning a level of income that is indexed against the minimum wage. In this incentive model, the mechanism would weight volunteering work greater than paid work and in effect, shorten the period of time taken to fulfil the hours of employment quota.

Such an incentive scheme would send a clear message to young volunteers and create long-term cultural change by increasing the favourability of volunteering over paid work. The scheme also has the flexibility and potential to be expanded further and include, for example, those on unemployment benefits and provide a substitution or a complimentary component of the Jobseeker or Work for the Dole program.

However, there are flaws inherent in such a scheme. The Federal Government recently attempted to remove a clause within the Youth Allowance process that allowed students to meet the independence criteria while still living at home or for those who took a deliberate gap year in order to fulfil the criteria.¹⁴ While there was broad support from both sides of parliament at the initial announcement of these reforms, a motion by the Federal Coalition in August 2010 called for the reinstatement of the independence test for students living in regional areas. This motion was accompanied by a set of reforms that were passed by the Senate seeking to increase the eligibility of regional students to claim Youth Allowance. Despite this, it appears highly unlikely that the present Government will look to further reform the payment.

As Youth Allowance is a diminishing transfer that reduces payment based on the number of hours of paid work undertaken per fortnight, those who do qualify for the payment could be allowed to offset voluntary work against reductions in the payment. This would benefit those that were not necessarily dependent on the payment for day-to-day living expenses or for those that worked only limited hours per fortnight. However, the necessary administrative requirements for such a scheme might prove prohibitive. Verification of volunteering hours would be required in a similar manner that Youth Allowance recipients must report their fortnightly earnings. The addition of

¹⁴ Social Security and Other Legislation Amendment (Income Support for Students) Act 2010. C2010A00017. Australia: ComLaw.

another verification and crosschecking process would place further responsibility on Centrelink and their resources.

Further, any volunteering incentive system that provides payment bonuses or removes qualification requirements to Youth Allowance recipients or applicants raises equity concerns. While generally speaking, those who volunteer do so for altruistic reasons, opening up a transfer payment such as this may lead to exploitation of the system by those who are time-rich and well off and effectively skew the payment from those who genuinely need the payment to those that can afford to volunteer in order to qualify. Similarly, increasing payments to those who volunteer their time, disadvantages those who are time poor and who need to undertake paid work to make a living. While any effort to promote volunteering should be applauded, a payment which reinforces socio-economic divides and rewards those that have more available time to volunteer over those who can't afford to, doesn't seem an equitable strategy to improve youth participation in volunteering. At this point, Left Right cannot advocate the utilising of Youth Allowance payments as an equitable mechanism for increasing young people's participation in volunteering.

Option 2: HECS – HELP-FEE Support

The second proposed system would involve a HECS/HELP-FEE debt reduction scheme for university students who volunteered. While an often-suggested mechanism, such a proposal has yet to find political traction. This approach to encouraging volunteering was proposed at the 2020 Summit and the proposal gained a level of popular support and led to both sides of government exploring the plausibility of such a scheme. While then Education Minister Julia Gillard was a public proponent of the idea, no discussion paper was made public and the dialogue largely disappeared from public view. Most recently, the Liberal Opposition Leader Tony Abbott proposed a \$7 million HECS reduction scheme linked to volunteering during the 2010 election campaign.¹⁵ No recent information could be found regarding this policy and whether or not it would be proposed by the Opposition.

Incentivising youth volunteering through a HECS-based scheme also gained the tentative support of Volunteering Australia and some peak student groups. However Volunteering Australia noted that university students were time poor and that the costs associated with volunteering may cancel out any benefit from such a proposal.¹⁶ We dispute this notion and note the emergence of trends, such as virtual volunteering, as new ways of encouraging volunteers beyond the traditional methods of engagement. Volunteering Australia proposed that for such a scheme to be effective, credits against a student HECS debt should only be earned after graduating.

However, Left Right believes a scheme that only provides an incentive to young people for their voluntary work after leaving university is flawed and would fail to

¹⁵ Liberal Party Of Australia 2010. Fact Sheet: AUSCORPS (Student Volunteer Credits). <http://www.probonoaustralia.com.au/sites/www.probonoaustralia.com.au/files/10-08-19_auscorps_fact_sheet.pdf>

¹⁶ Volunteering Australia 2008. The Reduction of HECS Debt through Community Service. Available at <http://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/files/Z9JV4NB414/HECS_and_volunteering_Final.pdf>

achieve the goal of boosting levels of volunteering and fostering a society which placed greater value on volunteerism. In order to foster life long volunteers, an incentive scheme would function more effectively if it encouraged young people to get involved as early as possible and not after they had accumulated a HECS debt and commenced full time employment. Despite the pressures of managing a part time job, classes and assignments, young people at university are the most logical group to take advantage of schemes to boost levels of youth volunteering. University students often have more flexible time commitments and are eager to participate in opportunities to further develop their skills.

Targeting students currently enrolled at university would ensure the scheme had a high impact and produced quality results, both in terms of the numbers of new volunteers attracted and the potential for these new volunteers to adopt volunteering in their communities as a matter of lifestyle. Students who had not previously considered volunteering would be more likely to research and pursue voluntary roles due to the incentive. Beyond the meaningful contributions these new volunteers would make to society, young people like this are the most likely to influence and permanently change attitudes towards volunteering. As a result, their contribution could lead to hundreds or even thousands of extra hours of volunteer work over their lifespan and encourage others to do likewise.

The effective value as a result of this volunteering contribution to the economy would far outweigh the cost of the Government writing-off parts of the nation's accumulated HECS debt. Furthermore, the skills developed during these volunteer experiences will equip young people for future employment, adding to the skills base of the Australian work force. Left Right therefore believes that any HECS reduction scheme would provide the most effective incentive and achieve the best results if targeted at students while at university and not after they graduate.

However, there are substantial criticisms of a HECS debt reduction scheme. Volunteering Australia, while supportive of the idea, has refused to label the scheme as volunteering and has labelled the scheme as "community involvement" and has argued against coercing university students into volunteering roles. The National Union of Students, while generally in favour of such a scheme, echoed Volunteering Australia's sentiments and raised similar equity concerns as those of the Youth Allowance scheme.¹⁶

If young people at university are only eligible to earn credit on their current semester of courses, students from a high socio-economic background would be at an advantage as they would possibly not have to engage in as much paid work as students from less well off or independent backgrounds in order to make a living. The equity issue could be overcome by linking eligibility for HECS reduction to qualification for Youth Allowance, however such a system would have the effect of lessening the eligible student base, thus lessening the impact of the incentive, and creating a two tiered system of university students.

Given the inherent inequities in these two systems, Left Right cannot advocate their adoption at this point in time. While Left Right is in principle supportive of strategies to increase the number of young people volunteering, introducing this specific

incentive option without further development may have the effect of dividing young people into those who can afford to volunteer and those who cannot.

The exploration of these models show that in theory there are ways, both simple and cost-effective, that can reward those that volunteer and provide an incentive for more young people to get involved. Their implementation and operation however must be further researched to ensure that each mechanism is efficient and effective.

Option 3: Embedded Undergraduate Volunteering

Strong opposition to a HECS reduction scheme has resulted in peak bodies and universities looking to alternative schemes aimed at encouraging volunteering participation amongst young people. The Australian Catholic University, in its *Early Achievers Program*, gives entry preferences to students who can demonstrate a history of volunteering.¹⁷ Universities Australia has supported the introduction of a national internship scheme aimed at providing paid work placements that would cover work in the voluntary sector. Most comprehensively, Macquarie University has implemented a scheme, unprecedented in Australia, which requires all students to engage in an embedded community service program as a part of their course work.¹⁸

Case Study: The Macquarie Model

The Macquarie scheme is made up of three units: *People; Planet; and Participation*. The final unit, participation, is where learning comes together with action. In this part of the program, Macquarie is currently working with local, national and international organisations and placing students in positions involving some form of community service.

The new degree is structured much like any normal degree with a minimum amount of participation time and a minimum of three pieces of assessment per semester, regardless of the location of the community service placement. Academic support for embedded, university-based volunteering schemes has not been unanimous. Detractors of university-based schemes argue that volunteering should be underpinned by altruism. For example, Professor Melanie Oppenheimer (2008) argues that volunteering is predicated on free will. Oppenheimer considers the use of compulsory volunteer systems as analogous to conscription or mandated community service.⁹

To the contrary, Professor Gail Whitman, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Social Inclusion) at Macquarie University, argues that the scheme provides students with extra opportunities to volunteer through their global leadership program, which is strictly voluntary and which is not credit granting. Professor Whitman also questions the utility of altruism as a paradigm for volunteering:

Altruism uncritiqued can be a bit unguided and not necessarily what communities have been seeking in developing countries... I have spent three

¹⁷ See: Australian Catholic University. 2011. *Who is an Early Achiever?* Available at: <<http://www.acu.edu.au/254383>>

¹⁸ See: Macquarie University. 2011. Social Inclusion. Available at: <<http://www.mq.edu.au/socialinclusion/>>

*tours in South Africa; it's not what communities want. They don't necessarily want someone who is there to be altruistic, they want skills exchange, learning exchange and the opportunity to go forward in areas they probably couldn't do on their own.*¹⁹

The National Union of Students has been publicly sceptical of embedded, university-based volunteering schemes, characterising students as 'too time poor'. However, Professor Whitman says this is not a relevant concern as, under the Macquarie scheme, volunteering is undertaken as a part of the degree, with important theoretical frameworks involved in the course, distinguishing it from compulsory volunteering.

Professor Whitman has seen students, as a result of community service course work, commit to additional volunteering work and "go way over and above what they are required to do..." Whitman also points out that Macquarie's embedded community service coursework has opened doors for students, resulting in their own career trajectories going to different kinds of places and doing different kinds of things based on these experiences.

In the context of the colleges in the United States, Austin and Sax (1998) found that undergraduate students' academic performance improves, life skills development strengthens and a sense of greater civic responsibility is fostered.²⁰ Additionally, Prouteau and Wolff (2006) found that volunteering provides students with work experience, assists them in choosing the right career and provides them with a professional edge as they leave university and seek jobs.²¹

Professor Whitman has identified similar benefits in the Australian context:

When you consider graduate capabilities that are required these day, employers want graduates that have had multilayered experiences, have been exposed to different world views, that have been exposed to different theoretical paradigms and that have that real hands on experience.

Embedded student volunteering programs are also beneficial to universities. Haski-Leventhal et al. (2008) identified that when students participate in voluntary activities, the social and cultural life on university campuses is improved and the university gains respect from the community.²² Professor Whitman has reported that the benefits of Macquarie's embedded community service scheme are already becoming apparent. As a result of a refugee mentoring program undertaken in Western Sydney by Macquarie University and the Department of Education and Communities, campus culture and community engagement have noticeably improved:

You can imagine one hundred young refugees and their parents in and around campus for the day. We had African drumming, we had study skills

¹⁹ Interview with Left Right Think-Tank – 25 May 2011.

²⁰ Astin, A. W., & Sax, L. J. (1998). How undergraduates are affected by service participation. *Journal of College Student Development*, 39, 251-263.

²¹ Prouteau, L., & Wolff, F. C. (2006). Does volunteer work pay off in the labor market? *Journal of SocioEconomics*, 35, 992-1013

²² Haski-Leventhal, D., Cnaan, R. A., Handy, F. and Associates (2008b), 'Students' vocational choices and voluntary action: a 12-nation study', *Voluntas*, 19:1-21.

sessions, we had all sorts of things happening for them. That changes the university's perception of itself and its role in society and in the community. It gives us a more porous boundary to the community and says that this is a site of learning for all people...

Research indicates that Gen Y is undergoing a transformation in its volunteering trends. Young people are more likely to volunteer for personal gain and personal satisfaction rather than altruism. The Macquarie scheme demonstrates a progressive understanding of the changing social values that prompt students to volunteer. Young people today volunteer for different reasons, but, once they become involved in volunteer work, they are more likely to engage in life long volunteering. Macquarie's embedded community service scheme provides students with an opportunity to gain valuable work experience and career skills in an increasing competitive market. It also fosters greater community awareness of community issues and a consolidated view of civic responsibility.

Recommendation 2

Left Right advocates the inclusion of embedded community service requirements in undergraduate degrees at Australian Universities. Universities should consider adopting a model similar to that in operation at Macquarie University as a means of increasing university prestige, preparing graduates for the workforce and encouraging students into participatory community service that contributes to social capital.

Universities are the key stakeholders in the implementation of embedded volunteering schemes. However, government can provide incentives in the form of monetary grants or concessions to promote their establishment. The Macquarie model is a groundbreaking step towards consolidating civic responsibility with academic learning. This is an opportunity for Australia to emerge as a world leader in citizenship incorporation in tertiary education.

Skills Development: Learning from Doing

HECS Reduction proposals and mandatory community engagement provide new mechanisms to attract young people to volunteering. Another approach to boosting youth participation involves improving the potential for young people to engage in quality skills development through their volunteer work.

Left Right's research indicates that young people are increasingly motivated to volunteer by the possibility of learning new and marketable skills.²³ Positions that include a well-defined program for skill development as a priority are more attractive for certain demographics such as university students and the unemployed.²⁴ With skills development being such an important motivation for young volunteers, improving and formalizing access to training and development will ensure a more rewarding and lasting experience for young volunteers. Clearly outlining expectations of the requirements and responsibilities of the volunteer position and the skills, which will be gained through the role, is essential.²⁵ In this way, volunteers who have been engaged for a specific, clearly articulated purpose are more likely to complete the role successfully.

The development of transferable skills is also of importance to young volunteers who are not currently studying at university, such as those who are unemployed or engaged in other work.²⁶ Organisations that provide positions and opportunities for such young people to develop skills serve to improve community capacity and engagement. For unemployed young people, volunteering provides an opportunity to gain skills that can be directly transferred to paid employment.²⁷ Like university students, young people seeking work have recognised the importance of demonstrating proficiency in a number of skill areas. Unemployed young people may be motivated to volunteer by the concept of 'resume building', improving employability by gaining experience and developing skills in a volunteer position.²⁸

Many university students engage in volunteering in their chosen sector or field of study in order to gain transferable skills and experience they require in order to demonstrate these competencies to future employers.²⁹ Interestingly, research indicates that many high-school and university students are engaged in volunteering which is not necessarily relevant to their academic areas of interest³⁰. In this case, the opportunities for students to participate in recognised skill development programs are less well defined.

²³ Adams, N. 2009, *Gen Y Volunteer: an exploration into engaging young people in HACC funded volunteer involving organisations*, Volunteering Tasmania, p. 4.

²⁴ Volunteering Australia 2006. *National Survey of Volunteering Issues*. p. 10.

Bussell, H. & Forbes, D. 2001, 'Understanding the Volunteer Market: the what, who and why of volunteering, in *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing*, Vol. 7, No. 3, p 11

²⁵ Davis-Smith, J., A. Ellis, S. Howlett and J. O'Brien. 2004. *Volunteering for all: exploring the link between volunteering and social exclusion*. Institute for Volunteering Research, p.13.

²⁶ Jones, F. 2000, *Youth Volunteering on the Rise*, Statistics Canada, p 4. Available at: <<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/studies-etudes/75-001/archive/e-pdf/4888-eng.pdf>>

²⁷ Ibid, p. 10.

²⁸ Ibid, p. 8.

²⁹ Ibid, p. 7.

³⁰ Adams, N. 2009, *Gen Y Volunteer: an exploration into engaging young people in HACC funded volunteer involving organisations*, Volunteering Tasmania, pp. 17 – 18.

The case for Skills Development

Volunteering groups, especially youth-led organisations, often find a disparity between a young volunteer's eagerness to volunteer and their capacity to perform tasks requiring experience and previous training. Many organisations lack the resources, personnel and finances to provide comprehensive training to volunteers. The lack of training and skill development opportunities is an ongoing theme in research on issues affecting young volunteers.³¹

Insufficient training of volunteers is a problem that creates secondary issues for not-for-profit organisations. Young people in non-youth led organisations are at a particular disadvantage where detailed skill development programs are not available. As a young recruitment officer for a Brisbane charity organisation states:

*When it comes to [recruiting for] important roles such as treasurer, I have to be secure in the knowledge that the organisation's money will be safe. So, I am not very likely to select a person in their 20's, because they will probably lack the experience and training of an older person.*³²

Young volunteers are generally less likely to be selected for volunteering positions in which experience and role-specific knowledge are highly valued. As a result, young volunteers are disproportionately denied access to the on-the-job skill development and training programs that are associated with higher-level volunteer roles.³³ Therefore, organisations that are unable to provide this suffer difficulty in recruiting and retaining youth volunteers.

Corporate citizenship programs offer a model of skills development that highlight the benefit of partnerships between the private sector and volunteer organisations³⁴ Corporations and business have access to resources which many not-for-profit organisations lack. They have easy access to a skills base that is proficient in human resources, business management and operational capacities.

Currently, many businesses engage with community organisations as a part of their corporate citizenship programs. These programs offer mutual benefits to both the community organisation and the business. In doing so, staff from these businesses are able to give back to their community within their work roll and in a capacity that may not have occurred outside of their employer. Many large businesses now allocate staff upwards of ten hours of annual leave for the purpose of community engagement. While Left Right applauds businesses that undertake such measures, ten hours appears to be a superficial and arbitrary allocation of leave. Rather than

³¹ Adams, N. 2009, *Gen Y Volunteer: an exploration into engaging young people in HACC funded volunteer involving organisations*, Volunteering Tasmania; Volunteering Australia 2006. *National Survey of Volunteering Issues*.

³² Interview with Left Right Think-Tank – 18 April 2011.

³³ Ferrier, F., I. Roos and M. Long 2004. *Passions, people and appreciation: making volunteering work for young people*. National Youth Affairs Research Scheme, p. 22.

³⁴ National Volunteer Skills Centre 2008. *What every volunteer needs: a mix of information, training and education*. Volunteering Australia. Available at http://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/files/ID8VYL83PC/What%20every%20volunteer%20needs%20final_280208.pdf

simply allocate each staff member a number of hours of leave, a more practical and effective model would be to undertake project and targeted volunteering.

Businesses are well equipped to provide skilled volunteering and to transfer those skills onto the organisation they volunteer with. For example, businesses with a strong knowledge in staff management can educate an organisation to implement new strategies for the hiring and management of volunteers. This transfer of skills is infinitely more valuable to an organisation rather than having businesses provide basic labour or hands on volunteers.

While there is no less value in volunteering in a hands on or labour intensive capacity, specific and targeted volunteering is of greater benefit to an organisation and will have a lasting impact that will not only improve the organisation itself, but also allow for the further transfer of skills to future volunteers.

The transfer of skills and knowledge between the two groups would be of benefit to both. As Deborah Mobberley notes:

If building a more committed, engaged, creative and energetic workplace is high on your company's agenda, then corporate volunteering might be the foundation of your staff retention³⁵

The benefits for a business providing and sharing knowledge with a not-for-profit are invaluable. Community organisations would be more attractive to young volunteers and would be better prepared for the induction and promotion of all volunteers. Private sector companies would receive good publicity and would also provide staff with an opportunity to implement their skills and training in a tangible, civic-minded manner.

Case study: NAB's Skilled Volunteering Program

National Australia Bank (NAB) has noted the importance of skilled volunteers in community organisations. In response, NAB has developed a program through which their employees can be matched to volunteering organisations that seek training or mentoring.³⁶ This skilled volunteering program enables community organisations to create a volunteer role to be filled by a NAB employee.

The NAB Skills register facilitates contact between organisations seeking skilled professionals and NAB employees who possess the specifically required skills.³⁷ NAB volunteers are not engaged in order to simply complete a task for the volunteer organisation. The program is designed to enable the transfer of knowledge and skills to volunteers in the not-for-profit sector.

³⁵ National Australia Bank 2007. Global trends in skill-based volunteering. Available at <http://www.nab.com.au/wps/wcm/connect/0d4ff9804b9d3c098310c3f1eeae8e9/Global_trends_in_skill-based_volunteering.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CACHEID=0d4ff9804b9d3c098310c3f1eeae8e9>

³⁶ National Australia Bank 2011. *Skilled-based Volunteering*. Available at: <http://www.nab.com.au/wps/wcm/connect/nab/nab/home/about_us/7/4/2/1/2>

³⁷ National Australia Bank 2011. *NAB Skills Register*. Available at: <http://www.nab.com.au/wps/wcm/connect/340d29804b9d65d59db0dff1eeae8e9/NAB_Skills_Register.pdf>

They have put in place specific frameworks to enable organisation to identify their needs for skilled volunteers and provide the opportunity to engage time-limited and virtual volunteers. Their time-limited volunteering system allows their staff to identify a project and make a lasting contribution, such as drafting financial procedures, within a limited timeframe. This increases the efficiency for both the organisation and NAB by most effectively utilising each others contribution. Similarly, their virtual volunteer stream allows NAB staff to contribute via correspondence and platforms like Skype. In this capacity, staff can contribute in a consulting capacity and also provide mentoring and skills sharing with other volunteers. For professional indemnity reasons, NAB staff are restricted from providing financial planning advice.

NAB looks for well thought-out projects that, while occurring on a short-term timeframe, have long-term impacts for the organisation. They note, “volunteer organisations face the same challenges as businesses such as managing change, coordinating the activities of branches in different geographic locations, recruiting and retaining human resources and developing new business concepts.”³⁶

Criticism could be aimed at NAB for heavily marketing the project and it could be suggested cynically that the scheme is motivated by public relations. While this may be true, both parties’ must receive something as a result of the exchange of skills. If co-branding or promotion of the exercise is all that is required, then it is hard to imagine organisations turning down these opportunities.

Recommendation 3:

We believe the private sector has much to offer volunteering organisations, both through resources and the sharing of skills and knowledge. Left Right advocates the allocation of funding to peak volunteering bodies to help facilitate and administer programs that look to partner businesses with volunteering organisations for the purpose of resource sharing.

Where funding is unavailable, we believe the onus is on the private sector to seek out these relationships and encourage their staff to contribute to their company’s role as corporate citizens. In partnering with an organisation, a business will gain invaluable experience for their staff as well as the benefit of engaging directly within their community. Such simple and targeted approaches have the capacity to transform organisations that would otherwise struggle to establish staff and organisational management structures. Further, businesses will have the opportunity to make lasting and influential change to an organisation, rather than the superficial or limited staff engagements that prevail today.

Conclusion

Left Right's initial findings into Youth Volunteering have hopefully shed new light onto an often talked about, but rarely acted upon area of volunteering. The recommendations that are made are intended to form part of long-term solution to improving youth volunteering. A sizeable increase in the number of young people participating in volunteering is not expected to occur overnight, but instead requires the ongoing fine-tuning of policy recommendations such as these and a generational change in attitudes towards volunteering. By improving the rates of volunteering of young people, Left Right hopes to promote the notion of life-long volunteering and see volunteering from a young age become the social norm. Young people are eager to give their time when they are valued and can see the benefits that come as a result of their contribution.