Older People and Volunteering

Prepared by
Zoë Gill,
University of Adelaide
Older People and Volunteering

Produced for the Office for Volunteers

By Zoë Gill, University of Adelaide

November 2005

Revised 2006
# Table of Contents

Table of Contents ................................................................................................................................................ i

Summary............................................................................................................................................................. iv

1 Introduction and Background .......................................................................................................................... 1

   1.1 Objectives of the Research Project.......................................................................................................... 1

   1.2 Definition of Volunteer............................................................................................................................... 1

   1.3 Definition of Older People......................................................................................................................... 2

   1.4 Older People in South Australia ............................................................................................................... 3

2 Older People and Volunteering....................................................................................................................... 6

   2.1 Older Volunteers ....................................................................................................................................... 6

       Are Older Volunteers different to Other Volunteers? ................................................................................ 6

       Older Volunteering .................................................................................................................................. 7

   2.2 Which Older People?................................................................................................................................ 8

       Not All Older People Volunteer at the Same Rates .................................................................................. 8

       Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Non-English Speaking Background Older People ............... 9

       Baby Boomers........................................................................................................................................... 10

   2.3 Where Older People Volunteer .............................................................................................................. 11

   2.4 Benefits of Older Volunteering................................................................................................................ 12

       Benefits for the Older Person ................................................................................................................... 12

       Benefits for the Community ..................................................................................................................... 14

       Volunteer-involving Organisations: What Older Volunteers Have to Offer ............................................ 14

       Benefits for the Private Sector.................................................................................................................. 16

   2.5 Motivation and Propensity to Volunteer ................................................................................................ 16
Summary

This research project into older volunteering was undertaken at the request of the Office for Volunteers. Its purpose is to scope out this area of volunteering in other settings and to consider this in the South Australian context, both with respect to government policy and organisational practice.

Chapter One of the research project considers definitional issues and the role of older people in South Australia. The research project takes volunteering to mean both formal and informal volunteering, but does not directly address caring performed by older people. However, it notes that more emphasis tends to be placed on formal volunteering, sometimes excluding types of volunteering typically performed by particular groups of older people.

The term ‘older people’ is recognised as a changing concept depending on the context in which it is used. Who counts as ‘older people’ for the purposes of volunteering initiatives and programs depends on the purposes of that program or initiative. Thus, being clear about these purposes is important. There is also diversity amongst people of the same age group. Understanding the differences amongst ‘older people’ and how this relates to their volunteering behaviour is important.

Nevertheless, South Australia has the oldest population in Australia. This has created some concern for the State Government that there will be a disproportionate number of older South Australians putting pressure on public resources. However, this research project emphasises the economic and social contribution older people bring to society including through volunteering. This should be encouraged through the concept of ‘healthy ageing’, both for the benefit of society and the individual.

Chapter Two of the research project considers the general issues around older people and volunteering: whether older volunteering is different to other volunteering; specifics of older volunteering; which older people volunteer; where they volunteer; the benefits of older volunteering for individuals, the community, volunteer-involving organisations, and the private sector; the motivations and propensity to volunteer; the barriers to volunteering including perceptions and attitudes, practical barriers, and cultural barriers; legal issues associated with older volunteering such as legal protection from age-discrimination, insurance issues, occupational health and safety, and financial implications; and reasons for older people remaining in volunteer experiences.

At present older volunteering occurs in significant numbers and with a large degree of commitment, thus it would be difficult to label older volunteering a problem. Volunteering is seen as providing benefits for the individual, the community, volunteer-involving organisations and the private sector. Thus older volunteering could be promoted further.

The ageing of the population also means it may be prudent for governments to encourage the continuation of the contribution that older people already make to the community, including through volunteering. An ageing population may also result in a change in
volunteering behaviour, particularly given that older people tend to volunteer in specific areas (most notably community and welfare fields). There may be a need to promote volunteering in a broader range of areas. This can also expand the volunteering experience and satisfaction of older people.

Older people can face particular barriers and disincentives to volunteering, such as discrimination, perceptions and attitudes, cultural barriers and practical barriers. Indeed not all older people volunteer at the same rates. These barriers and disincentives to volunteering need to be removed, dispelled, and challenged if older volunteering is to reach its full potential. Further, there needs to be more information about the implications of older volunteering for the individual and the volunteer-involving organisations, particularly with respect to effects on pension, Newstart allowance, superannuation, insurance, occupational health and safety, and legislative obligations with respect to age-discrimination.

Chapter Three of the research project addresses what other governments are doing with respect to older volunteering. Whilst the whole research project draws on experiences outside of South Australia, this chapter particularly focuses on the United Kingdom and the United States. These countries have large orchestrated older volunteer initiatives and programs. These provide some examples for South Australia to learn from and gain ideas from.

Chapter Four addresses four specific issues and trends, with a primary focus on the relationship between older volunteering and mature-aged employment, unemployment and retirement. It considers the current policy focus on increasing mature aged employment and how this can complement a focus on older volunteering through using volunteering to assist in phased retirement and as a step back into employment. It identifies, however, some concern that the current focus on delaying retirement may have a negative impact on older volunteering. Further research is required in this area.

The research project then considers three current trends in volunteering and how they relate to older volunteering: e-volunteering, corporate volunteering, and family volunteering. These can all complement older volunteering.

Finally, in Chapter Five the research project collates the recommendations made throughout the research project. It makes recommendations for government and for volunteer-involving organisations.

Throughout the research project practical examples of government and organisational initiatives are identified. These are shaded text and in themselves offer ideas for promoting and encouraging a diverse range of volunteering experiences for older people.
1 Introduction and Background

1.1 Objectives of the Research Project

This research project was undertaken at the request of the Office for Volunteers. Its purpose is to provide an initial exploration of issues surrounding older people and volunteering. In particular the author was asked to conduct a non-exhaustive scan of the literature on older people and volunteering in order to identify current issues, identify approaches to older volunteers both nationally and internationally, and make some connections to the South Australian context with respect to policy and organisational practice.

1.2 Definition of Volunteer

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) defines a volunteer as “someone who willingly gave unpaid help, in the form of time, service or skills, through an organisation or group” (ABS, 2001, 44). However, this tends to only cover what is commonly termed ‘formal’ volunteering, as it restricts the definition to community work conducted through an organisation or group. This ignores the large amount of ‘informal’ volunteers who contribute to society through their support and care for family, friends and neighbours. Informal volunteering is often done on an individual or family basis, rather than through a formal organisation. Informal volunteering is usually thought of as performed outside one’s own home. What is done inside the home is commonly termed caring or household work. This research project does not directly address the issues raised by caring and other work done inside the home.

Restricting the definition of volunteering to formal volunteering may be exclusionary to particular groups in society. In particular, women tend to be more associated with the ‘private’ home sphere and hence more likely to undertake such informal volunteering and caring work within the home (de Vaus, Gray and Stanton, 2003, 12).

Another group in society likely to be excluded from the acknowledgement of their volunteer activities by a narrow definition of volunteering are volunteers from a non-English speaking background or who are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. These groups of people tend to undertake extensive community work within their own community, but not necessarily through organisations (Esmond, 2001, vi). Limiting the definition of volunteering to formal volunteering is inappropriate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities’ sense of volunteering (Esmond, 2001, 34).

Lastly, significant contributions made by older people may be neglected through a narrow definition of volunteering. For example, the 1997 ABS time use survey indicated that older
people spend a significant amount of time in caring for an adult or doing favours for family and friends outside the home (Productivity Commission, 2005, 379)

Not all States employ the ABS definition. The South Australian Compact *Advancing the Community Together: A Partnership between the Volunteer Sector and the South Australian Government (May 2003)* (ACT) defines volunteering as including both informal and formal volunteering:

Volunteering is an activity that is of benefit to the community, is done of one’s freewill and is undertaken without monetary reward. Volunteering can occur either within the framework of community organisations or groups (known as ‘formal volunteering’) or as individuals working outside structured organisations, for example helping your neighbour with their grocery shopping (known as ‘informal volunteering’).

However, much of the literature addresses formal volunteering with consequent implications for the scope of this research project. It is recommended, however, that government do more to promote and understand the role played by informal volunteering, particularly by various groups of older people.

### 1.3 Definition of Older People

The concept of ‘older people’ suggests a homogeneity and fixedness that needs to be challenged.

People of the same age can be considered older or not, depending on the context in which they find themselves. The Australian Government website, Jobwise, directed at increasing employment for older workers, considers older workers to be 45 and over (jobwise website (no.1)). In contrast the ABS defines the aged as 65 and over (ABS, 2000). The Productivity Commission tends to refer to the aged as 65 and over and to those aged over 85 years as the ‘oldest old’ (Productivity Commission, 2005, xvi)

With respect to volunteering what age counts as older in government programs and the literature is in the main dependant on the individual programs, research, and projects. The English Government has funded projects directed at people aged over 50 (Rochester and Huchison, 2002), whilst the USA’s Senior Corps programmes are directed at people over 60 and over 55, dependant on the specific programme (Senior Corps website).

Which age group is covered in any (government or third sector) older volunteer program is often dependant on the purposes of the program. For example, if the purpose of the program is to promote post-retirement activity, then the average age of retirement may be the age limit. In contrast, governments may see older volunteer programs as a way to promote volunteering by people who will form the post-retirement cohort in the years to come. In this case, older volunteer programs may target the baby boomers who are aged between 42 and 59 (Esmond, 2001, 8). Thus the lower age limit for older volunteer programs could be as low as 42. Alternatively, older volunteer programs could be directed at encouraging those least likely to volunteer to volunteer. According to the ABS survey on volunteering in Australia those aged over 75 volunteer at the lowest rate (17.8%) (ABS, 2001, 13), hence older volunteers may be 75 and over. Any government or third sector policy on older volunteers needs to consider what the purposes of the policy are before defining ‘older people’.
However, it should be noted that there may be a risk of ostracising “younger” older people by terming a policy for ‘older people’ – a 45-year-old baby boomer may not wish to identify as an ‘older person’. Thus perhaps there needs to be programs for both ‘mature-age’ volunteering and ‘older’ volunteering, but again what age group fits into what category needs to be determined by the purposes of the program.

Further, this terminology does not recognise differences amongst older people. Older people may come from different cultural, ethnic, social, economic, sexuality, ability, demographic and gender backgrounds. In the above section reference was made to the significance of some of these characteristics in terms of including types of volunteer work. Further, it should be noted that people from lower socio-economic groups are less likely to volunteer (Onyx and Warburton, 2003, 65-66). It is suggested that more work should be done on understanding the types and amounts of volunteer work undertaken by these different groups of older people.

1.4 Older People in South Australia

South Australia has the oldest population in Australia (Government of South Australia, 2004, 5), a demographic trend which is projected to continue. At present the percentage of people over 65 years is 14.7% whereas it is projected that at 2050, those over 65 years will make up 31% of the State’s population. Similarly, those over 85 years are projected to increase four-fold (Government of South Australia, 2004, 5).

Relatedly, those in the traditional working age (15-64) in South Australia are projected to decline in numbers (Government of South Australia, 2004, 7). Further, there is a strong trend towards (both voluntary and non-voluntary) retirement in South Australia, with the State having the highest proportion of 50-64 year olds retired from full time work (47.6%) (Government of South Australia, 2004, 7). The South Australian Government’s population policy, prosperity through people: A Population Policy for South Australia (March 2004), claims that “[w]ith the inevitable shift of the ‘baby boomer’ generation into retirement, the State’s working age population is projected to decline even sooner – within the next decade’ (Government of South Australia, 2004, 1).

The fear for government is that with this ageing population and increased retirement, there will be a disproportionate number of workers to non-workers within South Australia. Some of this fear stems from the assumption that older people, if not in paid employment, are a drain on society. However, governments concerned about the negative impacts of an ageing population need to be careful not to ignore the productive contribution older people make to society. On a national level people aged over 55 are estimated to contribute $74.5 billion per annum in unpaid caring, formal and informal voluntary work (de Vaus, Gray, and Stanton, 2003). Similarly, the Productivity Commission has commented on the contribution older people make to society through formal and informal voluntary work (Productivity Commission, 2005, xxxviii).

A recent study of the productive contribution of older South Australians (65-101 years, with a mean age of 81.4 years) estimates this value as being between $4.9 and $8.1 billion (Ranzijn, Harford, and Andrews, 2002). If non-productive (that is, activities not associated with goods and services) were included this would be much higher. This is compared to the costs of health and aged care that were calculated to be $1.8 billion (Ranzijn, Harford, and Andrews, 2002). Thus, older people in South Australia can be seen as making a huge economic contribution to South Australia rather than being a drain on society. Their non-economic contribution should not be forgotten.
The South Australian population policy recognises the social and economic contribution older people can make:

Ageing need not be a barrier to people enjoying active and independent lives, participating in paid or voluntary work, nor to their making a positive contribution to their families or communities. There are significant opportunities to use the skills and talents of older workers in a range of activities in education, mentoring, skills development and community projects. (Government of South Australia, 2004, 16)

Traditionally, older people have been seen as in physical decline, as dependant, and even as a social burden (Smith and Gay, 2005). However, governments everywhere are recognising that older people are active participants in society through caring for others within their homes, informal and formal volunteering and through leisure activities and part-time work (Smith and Gay, 2005). Many countries concerned with population ageing are promoting the concept of active or productive ageing. Consistent with this approach, South Australia's population policy promotes healthy ageing.

The South Australian Government's population policy calls for a fostering of 'healthy ageing' and the encouragement of 'active social, cultural and economic participation for all' (Government of South Australia, 2004, 8). It acknowledges that there will be some increase in the ratio of working to non-working people (Government of South Australia, 2004, 9) but states that the Government's policy is both to attempt to shape population trends that can be changed and to 'anticipate and respond to those trends that cannot be altered' (Government of South Australia, 2004, 9). Whilst the government may be attempting to reduce the ageing of the population, at the same time it can be attempting to provide strategies to provide for this ageing population.1 Indeed, one of the strategies articulated in the policy is to improve 'the prospects and choices of mature aged people' (Government of South Australia, 2004, 9).

Promoting volunteering would fit into this policy strategy of planning for a healthy ageing population as it would both increase the life choices of older people, improve their health if the option is taken up, and increase older people's contribution to the social and economic well being of the State. Thus, it is recommended that the South Australian Government promote older volunteering as part of its population strategy. However, care needs to be taken that a focus on healthy ageing does not make individual older people responsible (or accountable) for their health. The government needs to provide expanded options, not blame people for not taking these up.

South Australia has an Office for the Ageing Division (OFTA) within the Department for Families and Communities. OFTA's website can be found through the Department of Families and Communities website (no.1). However, it needs to be noted that ageing does not appear, if the website is an accurate indicator, to take a high priority in the Department for Families and Communities. The website does not make access to information about ageing easy to gain.2 The OFTA website indicates that OFTA will be developing a new Ageing Strategy for South Australia. It is recommended that the Office for Volunteers establishes cross-departmental links with OFTA so as to have some input into this strategy and to ensure the role volunteering plays in encouraging active ageing is highlighted.

---

1 This approach resonates with the Productivity Commission's report, which suggests that issues relating to the ageing population will not be solved only by demographic population policies (Productivity Commission, 2005, xxxix).

2 A point also made by COTA National Seniors (see their website)
Of interest in the current context is OFTA’s responsibility for the Positive Ageing Development Grants. Information about these can be found at Department of Families and Communities website (no.2). According to the website:

Positive Ageing Development Grants - one-off funding of up to $25,000 may be sought for pioneering projects that will:

- encourage seniors to be engaged in their communities
- assist or maintain seniors’ connection and contribution to their communities
- improve community attitudes towards ageing and seniors
- develop the citizenship of older people and promote progressive attitudes to their own ageing.

Volunteer agencies are eligible for these grants. Volunteer-involving organisations and volunteer agencies such as Volunteering SA Inc need to take advantage of these grants. Of the 2004-2005 approved projects only one is likely to involve volunteers, though more information is needed here. Panorama Campus - Engineering TAFESA was granted $24,700 to assist in contacting and seeking out retired TAFE staff from the Engineering Program to provide training in what are described as ‘skills at risk areas’. It is unclear from the description whether this assistance from retired staff would be in a voluntary capacity. Nevertheless, this provides some ideas in regards to how the grants could be used to assist in promoting volunteer work in terms of older volunteers passing on their skills and knowledge through training.

Cross-departmental links between the Office for the Ageing and the Office for Volunteers could involve the promotion of these grants to volunteer-involving organisations at relatively low cost. These organisations have the compatible goals of promoting positive ageing and increasing the numbers of older volunteers.

Other South Australian Government initiatives to assist older volunteers include a Public Transport Tickets program, which reduces the cost of peak hour public transport for volunteers of public hospitals for concession or pension card holders (Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group, 2005). However, as we shall see below, it is recommended that all out of pocket expenses be reimbursed to older volunteers. Or, at least, this reduction in transport cost could be extended to all older volunteering.

There is some indication that Government departments are starting to support volunteering by older people. For example, the Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology intend to commence a mature aged mentoring program (Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group, 2005: telephone conversation with DFEEST, 10 November 2005). However, such programs seem to be isolated initiatives and information about government supported older volunteering is difficult to find.

Lastly, Volunteering SA Inc.’s website provides specific information on senior volunteering and why seniors may wish to volunteer, but does not seem to offer any specific initiatives or recruitment methods for older volunteers.

---

3 The department had intended on commencing this project in July (Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group, 2005), however it has not yet been commenced. The department still intends to commence this project under the SAWorks: Mature Age People framework (telephone conversation with DFEEST, 10 November 2005)
2 Older People and Volunteering

2.1 Older Volunteers

Are Older Volunteers different to Other Volunteers?

There is some question as to whether older volunteers should be treated differently to volunteers generally. This is a significant issue given that some governments, for example in the UK and the USA, have policies and programs specifically directed at increasing the number of older volunteers. In contrast, the Netherlands has resisted this trend towards a specific focus on older volunteers, preferring to view older people as similar to other citizens. Significantly, the Netherlands’ approach is based on the belief that all citizens need to contribute to society and volunteering is one way of doing this. The idea is that different treatment of people should be based on need not age (Baldock, 2000, 93).

These different policy approaches to older volunteers reflect academic debates around category politics (Bacchi, 1996). Some argue that to single out a particular group places them as different and may cause them to be treated or viewed unfairly by others in society. However, when it does seem appropriate to direct attention to a particular group is when society already treats them as a group in an unfair way. So, for example, it would seem more obviously justifiable to direct policy specifically at older volunteers where this group of people face barriers to the volunteering experience due to discrimination or financial disincentives and the policy is directed at removing these barriers. It is less obvious why older people need to be singled out for policy attention in terms of merely increasing their numbers. However, given the South Australian Government’s concern with the ageing population, policies that encourage and promote active ageing may be desirable, provided they do not individualise the issue.

In the literature and policy documents that look specifically at older volunteers, there are two different approaches to older people and volunteering. Some (Esmond, 2001, 2002, 2004) tend to suggest that volunteering behaviour depends on the generation one comes from such as the baby boomers, implying that particular generations have distinct characteristics that influence whether they volunteer or not. Others (Omoto, Snyder and Martino, 2000) tend to focus more on a life-cycle understanding of volunteering which suggests more that volunteering depends on other commitments such as work and family obligations and hence changes over time. Longitudinal studies, rather than cross-sectional studies, tend to offer a better understanding of life cycle effects on volunteering. In this context it has been suggested that older volunteers are more likely to have a choice about
where they volunteer as this is not as connected to family and work demands as it is in younger life (Musick and Wilson, 2003, 261).

Whatever the causes of volunteering activity (belonging to a particular generation or being in a particular life stage) the literature tends to suggest that older volunteers have some distinct characteristics and benefit from volunteering in different ways to younger people. For example, in terms of distinct characteristics, some of the literature suggests that older people tend to be motivated to volunteer because of community obligation factors or for the service side of volunteering whilst younger volunteers tend to volunteer for reasons associated with interpersonal relationships. This may have implications for how to direct recruitment campaigns for volunteer-involving organisations (Omoto, Snyder and Martino, 2000). An example of different benefits of volunteering is a recent US study, which found that formal volunteering reduces depression in the elderly (65+) but not necessarily in younger volunteers (Musick and Wilson, 2003). Further research is needed as to whether these differences exist in the South Australian context.

**Older Volunteering**

On a national level, older people volunteer in large numbers and increasingly so. The ABS survey into voluntary work in Australia found that whilst volunteer rates increased in all age groups and both sexes, it increased the most in ‘the 18-24 (17% to 27%) and the 55-64 (24% to 33%) years groups’ (ABS, 2001, 3). Whilst the number of volunteers was highest in the 35-44 age group (40%), older Australians tend to volunteer more time (Onyx and Warburton, 2003, 65; ABS, 2001, 6-7). The ABS survey found that amount of time spent in volunteering increases with age such that the 65-74 age group median hours were 2.5 per week compared to the overall median hours of voluntary work of 1.4 per week (ABS, 2001, 6-7). Further, older people tend to stay with organisations longer (Onyx and Warburton, 2003, 65). Also, the amount of informal volunteering was not recorded by the ABS, thus perhaps underestimating the amount of older volunteering with respect to other age groups.

Despite the ABS results that indicate that the 35-44 age group volunteers at the highest rate in Australia, a recent study of volunteering in South Australia (Wilson, Spoehr and Mclean, 2005) indicates that those aged 55-64 (over 20%) volunteer at the highest rate with those in the 45-54 age group at the next highest rate (20%). Those in the 65-74 age group still volunteer at a rate of over 16%5. There is a marked decline in the rate of 75+ year olds volunteering (less than 4%) (Wilson, Spoehr and Mclean, 2005, 36). Similarly, Esmond (2002, 13) found that the average age group of 445 organisations in Western Australia was between 60-70 years of age. There is every chance that South Australia would have similar results. Overall, people over 45 volunteer in significant numbers.

Further, the Productivity Commission projects that as a result of the ageing population older people will volunteer in increasing numbers, changing the age distribution of volunteering. It also projects that the value of volunteering generally will rise from 1.8 to 2.1 percent of GDP (Productivity Commission, 2005, xxxviii, 93, & 382). As a consequence of this increase in older people volunteering, the Commission speculates that organisations that have traditionally relied on younger volunteers may experience a shortage of

---

1 While it is difficult to determine from the graphical representation the actual figures, it appears as though the rate of volunteering is between 23-24%
2 Again the exact rate of volunteering is difficult to read but is clearly over 16%
3 The difference in the ABS Australian rates and the Wilson, Spoehr and Mclean, 2005, South Australian rates could be partly due to the 4-5 year time difference. A large number of those in the 34-45 age bracket in the ABS survey may now be in the 45-54 age group.
volunteers. Given that older people tend to volunteer more in community and welfare based organisations this would particularly affect organisations in the areas of emergency services, sporting and recreation, and education, training and youth development (Productivity Commission, 2005, 93-94). This suggests that such organisations need to look towards ways of recruiting older volunteers.

This data makes it unclear that the current rate of older volunteers could be described as a ‘problem’, despite the ageing of the population. Nevertheless, the goal of the South Australian Government is to increase the number of volunteers to 50% by 2010 (SA Government Strategic Plan). An increase in the number of older people volunteering would assist this.

### 2.2 Which Older People?

**Not All Older People Volunteer at the Same Rates**

As observed above the term ‘older people’ can cover a very wide age span. Different age groups volunteer at different rates (ABS, 2001, 3 & 12; Wilson, Spoehr and Mclean, 2005, 36). More needs to be understood about the different volunteering rates between the different age groups. And more needs to be done to support volunteering by those, particularly aged over 75, who volunteer at a lower rate. This seems especially important given the health benefits older people experience through volunteering (see section on benefits below)

An issue for us at RSVP is to find meaningful volunteering opportunities for very frail older people. When I joined RSVP I met many volunteers who had been with the organisation twelve years, and joined at 65 or 70. They were often in very good health and had tremendous energy but now, as they are in their middle 80s, it is harder. One thing we have been looking at is how we can still involve them in volunteering. What can they be involved in? One very successful scheme, which is run in Camden, is a telephone befriending service, which is run by RSVP and funded by Camden social services. Older people who are extremely isolated and house bound were originally referred to us as needing an older volunteer to ring them, and at least two thirds of these people have now become telephone friends themselves. When you meet people from this group they say what a difference it has made for them to feel involved in both making and receiving these friendship calls.

We also have several groups across the country based in residential homes who knit teddies for emergency services, little garments for hospitals’ special needs units. I went to a residential home in Cambridge and the average volunteers’ age is about 85. They have been sending knitted items and books and a variety of things to hospitals that they had linked up with in Africa. They had wonderful feedback from children and staff there showing the things they produced.

Excerpt from Directors Speech on Older Volunteering 2001 (CSV Senior Volunteers Directors Speech website)

Age is not the only diversifying factor amongst older volunteers. Older people more likely to volunteer ‘come from higher socio-economic groups, to be married, in reasonable health, have larger social networks, and to have a religious affiliation’ (Onyx and Warburton, 2003, 65-66) and to have a history of volunteering and be in paid work.
Volunteer programs for older people could be directed at encouraging those groups who are less likely to volunteer to do so.

The *Inside Out* Project

This project set out to recruit volunteers from among the older people who did not see themselves as volunteers and who would not be seen by others in that light. Many of those they have involved were residents in care homes and sheltered housing or users of day centres.

(Rochester and Hutchison, 2002, 28)

Rural and remote older volunteers are another group with specific issues due to distance and isolation and dwindling numbers (Esmond, 2001, vi & 30-33). More research needs to be undertaken with respect to the specific issues faced by older volunteers in rural or remote areas.

**Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Non-English Speaking Background Older People**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Non-English Speaking background older people may have different ways of volunteering or face cultural barriers to volunteering in mainstream organisations. In the UK context it has been observed that:

Older people from black and minority ethnic communities with little or no tradition of formal volunteering are more likely to volunteer within their own communities than in “mainstream” organisations. (Rochester and Hutchison, 2002, vii)

Whether similar observations can be made in the specific Australian context needs to be researched further. Nevertheless preliminary research by Esmond (2001) indicates that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities’ sense of volunteering is not captured by traditional understandings of volunteering (Esmond, 2001, 34; see also The Smith Family, 2005, 8). According to Esmond the large amount of activities undertaken within the Indigenous community by community members is not called volunteering at all but is understood more in terms of community goodwill. She offers examples of such activities (Esmond, 2001, 34-35):

- Reconciliation events, meetings, public consultations
- Family support, domestic violence issues
- Youth Work
- Delivering groceries to community centres
- Getting programs and services up and running (eg. Childcare centres, aged care)
- Mentoring
- Legal advice
- Helping people of the Stolen Generation find their families
- Providing a link between gaol inmates and their families

We don't really call it volunteering in our community. It's just something you do. What happens is that the most stable member or members of the family will help out all the others and I'm talking about extended families, there are lot of others to give a hand to, it's their responsibility and they haven't got time for anything else outside (male participant).

(Excerpt from Esmond, 2001, 35)

It is commonly accepted that Indigenous Australians have a shorter life expectancy and poorer health than other Australians. Whilst none of the material surveyed directly addressed this issue, it is suggested here that health issues may also create a barrier to older Indigenous Australians volunteering both within their own and the wider community. It may also mean that the benefits of volunteering, experienced by non-Indigenous older people are not experienced by older Indigenous people. The relationship between older Indigenous people’s health and their volunteering needs to be researched further.

Esmond also found in her research that ethnic communities also tended to undertake informal volunteer activities and did not tend to talk about such work as volunteering at all (Esmond, 2001, 35). This research project supports Esmond’s call for ‘[m]ore extensive research focusing specifically on indigenous and ethnic communities …and a re-defining of the terminology and measurement of volunteering’ (Esmond, 2001, 36).

Somali Women’s Association and Welfare Group: Somali Women’s Education and Training Project

This project worked with women who had come to Sheffield because of the civil war in Somalia. It provided an opportunity for women who felt isolated in a new country to come together in the comfort of an all-women’s group made up of people with a common culture. Together they learned English, cooking, sewing, embroidery and other skills. The nine or ten older women who had been recruited as volunteers found it a new experience because there was no tradition of volunteering in Somalia. They helped with cooking, assisted the tutors, helped look after the children who came to the centre with their mothers and undertook some interpreting. There was a strong philosophy of mutual aid and the sharing of skills, and little distinction was made between the roles and statuses of “volunteers” and “users”.

(Excerpt from Rochester and Hutchison, 2002, 32)

**Baby Boomers**

Baby boomers are another group that has received specific attention in the literature. Baby boomers are the large number of people born between 1946 and 1963 (Esmond, 2001, 8). Thus, in 2005 baby boomers are aged between 42 and 59. If policies directed at increasing older volunteering are a response to population projections of an ageing population any long term policy should take into account baby boomers as the next
generation of ‘older volunteers’. This is particularly so given that recent volunteer experience is a high predictor for older volunteering (Mutchler, Burr and Caro, 2003, 1287). In this vein the Smith Family (2005) suggests that waiting for baby boomers to retire before recruiting them to volunteering may be too late. This document draws attention to specific issues for baby boomers where appropriate.

However, one needs to be careful in describing baby boomers as ‘older volunteers’. This may not fit with their image of themselves. It is suggested that any programs directed at baby boomers could be called mature-age volunteering rather than older volunteering.

2.3 Where Older People Volunteer

Older people can and do volunteer in a diverse range of fields. In Australia older volunteers are ‘more likely to volunteer for community or welfare organisations than other age groups’ (Onyx and Warburton, 2003, 65; ABS 2001, 23) (this was true of all age groups over 55). They also volunteered in sport/recreation, education/training/youth development, religious organisations and health but (in descending order) in fewer numbers (ABS, 2001, 23). One American study of 55-74 year olds found that those who volunteered did so in religious organisations (29%), educational organisations (7%), political organisations (7%), senior citizen groups (13%), and other (17%) (Mutchler, Burr and Caro, 2003, 1275). The review of the English Home Office Older Volunteers Initiative found that older people can (with encouragement) volunteer in a large number of areas where they do not traditionally do so (Rochester and Hutchison, 2002, vii). The areas they were involved in included health promotion, community education, social welfare, child protection, education, social welfare, crime prevention, heritage, and overseas development (Rochester and Hutchison, 2002, 14).

Broadening the spectrum of areas in which older people volunteer may be particularly important in light of the Productivity Commission’s projection that with the ageing population the age distribution of volunteers will change such that older people will predominantly volunteer. This means there may be a shortfall of volunteers in areas that older people tend not to volunteer in (Productivity Commission, 2005, 93-94 & 382-383).

Older people can also undertake a wide and diverse range of activities. The English HOOVI projects demonstrate this. Older people performed the following activities (Rochester and Hutchison, 2002, 12):

- direct work with users or beneficiaries such as befriending, advocacy, providing advice and information, providing care, teaching and youth work
- support roles including the provision of administrative and secretarial support
- practical tasks such as cooking and gardening

---

7 The Productivity Commission includes religious organisations as one of the areas that older people predominantly volunteer in (Productivity Commission, 2005, 377)
leadership and managerial activities such as co-ordinating the activities of other volunteers, serving as committee members, assessing needs and developing new activities, public relations work and campaigning.

Government initiatives and volunteer-involving organisations could create and promote a wider number of opportunities for older volunteers, both in terms of the areas of volunteer action and the activities undertaken.

2.4 Benefits of Older Volunteering

Older volunteering is positively endorsed within the literature. Older people today are seen as generally being in good health, are well educated, and have work and life experiences to share with others (Mutchler, Burr and Caro, 2003, 1268). Volunteering is generally accepted as contributing to social capital. Social capital is defined by Putnam as ‘those features of social organisation, such as trust, norms and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions’ (Putnam, quoted in Onyx and Warburton, 2003, 67). Social capital is seen as benefiting both the individual and the community (Onyx and Warburton, 2003, 67). Some suggest that formal volunteering is crucial to social capital as it creates social networks beyond the family (Onyx and Warburton, 2003, 67-68).

There are benefits of older volunteering for the individual, government, volunteer-involving organisations, and the private sector.

Benefits for the Older Person

The Literature

The international and national literature on volunteers indicates a number of benefits for older volunteers:

Health

The literature on volunteering and health amongst older people generally emphasises the benefits of volunteering on older people’s health. Nonetheless there are some contradictory findings about the benefits of informal volunteering as opposed to formal volunteering and whether health benefits are for self-reported health problems or diagnosed health problems. Some of the findings are listed below:

- Formal volunteering lowers depression levels for older people (65+) (Musick and Wilson, 2003) and provides mental health benefits (Li and Ferraro, 2005). This is not the case for informal volunteering.

- Volunteering decreases self-reported (though not diagnosed) health problems, slows increase in depression and reduces morbidity rates (Lum and Lightfoot, 2005) (US-longitudinal study of people over the age of 70 who volunteered over 100 hours in 1993)

- A review article on volunteering and health among older adults claims that there is ‘consistent evidence that morbidity rates, functional health indices, self reported health and life satisfaction are affected by formal and informal volunteering (Onyx and Warburton, 2003, 65) and concludes that ‘we may reasonably conclude…that formal
volunteering has a direct impact on well-being, functional health and longevity, and this impact is net of initial health levels, socio-economic status, or informal social integration’ (Onyx and Warburton, 2003, 67).

- Volunteering benefits the individuals health…and decreases mortality (Mutchler, Burr and Caro, 2003, 1270).

More needs to be learnt about the different health effects of informal and formal volunteering for older people in South Australia.

**Social and Self-perception benefits**

- Volunteering is an ‘expression of active social engagement’ (Li and Ferraro, 2005, 68).

- Volunteering strengthens informal networks and social support systems (Mutchler, Burr and Caro, 2003, 1270).

- Older people who volunteer ‘have multiple and valued social roles, and they are in a position to assist others while gaining information and skills for themselves. They are likely to maintain significantly higher levels of well-being, a strong sense of their own worth … than those who do not volunteer’ (Onyx and Warburton, 2003, 68).

- Volunteering benefits the individual’s life satisfaction, self-esteem and psychological well-being (Mutchler, Burr and Caro, 2003, 1270).

- Volunteering leads to increased social contact with a wide range of people. This, in turn, increases the chances of older people finding social support, useful contacts, and helpful information (Musick and Wilson, 2003, 260).

**Self-reported benefits**

The review of the HOOVI initiative lists a number of reasons given by informants of why older people stayed in volunteer experiences (Rochester and Hutchison, 2002, 25-26). Some of these suggest a number of benefits of volunteering to the older volunteer:

- Keeping busy and active

- Feeling like you are doing something useful and active, both in the actual volunteer activity and in contributing to a worthwhile organisation/project

- A sense of taking responsibility

- A sense of contributing to an organisation’s decision making

- An opportunity to learn new skills

- An opportunity to develop existing interests and skills

- An opportunity for social interaction and meeting new people.
Not all volunteering may be equally beneficial

There are some indications that too much volunteering, or stressful volunteering, or volunteering that lacks social support may not be beneficial (Onyx and Warburton, 2003, 68). A recent review suggests that volunteering for older people works best when it provides (Onyx and Warburton, 2003, 68):

- The possibility of maintaining physical and cognitive activity
- Information and encouragement to maintain or improve good health practices
- Strong personal emotional support
- The opportunity to contribute to the well-being of others
- Strong links into supportive community networks.

Volunteer-involving organisations wishing to recruit older volunteers may need to ensure these elements exist in their volunteer programs. They may also need to explicitly draw out in their recruitment campaigns how these factors exist in their volunteer programs.

Benefits for the Community

Older volunteering benefits the community by creating social capital. This makes for a healthy, thriving community. In more specific terms, as we have seen, South Australia has an ageing population. Increasing the contribution older people make to society through non-paid avenues helps reduce some of the negative impacts of an ageing population. In financial terms we have seen above that older people in South Australia already contribute an estimated value of between $4.9 and $8.1 billion (Ranzijn, Harford, and Andrews, 2002). And if non-productive (that is activities not associated with goods and services) were included this would be much higher. Increasing this contribution benefits the community. Further, the community benefits from a society with a healthy and active older population through the skills and experiences that can be maintained and passed on to the community generally, the networks and trust created, and the reduced pressure on the health system.

Volunteer-involving Organisations: What Older Volunteers Have to Offer

Older volunteers have a number of assets and qualities to offer a volunteer-involving organisation. These include (Rochester and Hutchison, 2002, 22-23):

- Maturity – older people have "lived through enough experiences" to enable them to understand the problems of others
- Skills – they have also "spent decades perfecting all kinds of skills"

---

8 This list is a combination of the list provided in the UK’s Institute of Volunteers Research’s good practice guide to involving older volunteers (quoted in Rochester and Hutchison, 2002, 21-22) and a summary of factors highlighted by the participants in the Home Office Older Volunteers Initiative (Rochester and Hutchison, 2002, 21-22).
Availability – people who have retired from paid work or have finished child rearing tend to have more spare time and can be flexible about when they participate

Loyalty – older people spend more time on their volunteering and remain longer with their organisations than younger people

Numbers – older people make up an ever-increasing proportion of the population and organisations cannot afford to ignore this important resource

Confidence and authority - older volunteers were felt to be able to indicate if an activity were too much, to ask questions about the way things were run, to manage themselves, and to nurture younger volunteers

Patience and tolerance - older volunteers were felt to be more stable, have a calmer head, see issues from a number of perspectives, and work at a steadier pace

Commitment and continuity - older people were felt to be more reliable, be more willing to see a project through, be more tenacious, have an interest in the activity, and be more altruistic than younger volunteers

Ability to engage with other older people - it was felt that older people used less jargon in educational programs, went at a slower pace, were less intimidating, and could relate to older people’s life experiences

Age Concern England: Age Resource Project

There were two advantages of involving older volunteers in helping older people get to grips with computers. Firstly they had more patience and were happy to spend time showing older people how to use the computer – unlike younger people who “just whiz and do it and don’t really show how to do it”. Secondly they were less self-centred: younger people may want to practice their skills whereas older people want to share skills.

(Excerpt taken from Rochester and Hutchison, 2002, 23)

Ability to engage with children and young people - it was felt that older people offered life experiences and a different perspective which assisted in mentoring volunteering.

Dark Horse Venture: Inside Out Projects

One of the projects brought together older people and school children by e-mail. The older people developed skills in using the computer and the children learned about recent social history. The children enjoyed reading what the older people wrote and wanted to maintain contact with them. They also felt that they “understood old people better” since taking part in the project and valued them more as a group within the local community.

(Excerpt taken from Rochester and Hutchison, 2002, 31)
Benefits for the Private Sector

Volunteering by older people (as we shall see below) can be viewed as a transition out of paid employment or as a step back into paid employment. These can both benefit the private sector.

Volunteering as a way of transitioning out of full-time employment towards retirement could include combining part-time employment and volunteer activity. This may mean that older people could delay full retirement. The private sector could benefit from this prolonged employment amongst older people and the retention of corporate knowledge and skills that goes with this, whilst having the opportunity to train up new workers. As such, the private sector needs to play a role in promoting older volunteering as a step towards retirement. Some of the literature even talks about volunteering as a mentor within the private sector. However, volunteering should never be used to replace paid employment (Volunteering Australia, 2001).

Another way in which the private sector can benefit from older volunteering is where volunteering is used as an avenue back into employment. In this situation older people who have been unemployed or retrenched through the changing skills required by the work environment can use volunteering as a way of updating skills and creating networks to facilitate new employment options. In this situation the private sector benefits from the new skills gained by these volunteers and a more skills-rich workforce.

2.5 Motivation and Propensity to Volunteer

Understanding the indicators of older volunteering provides some direction as to where efforts to increase volunteering should be directed.

Propensity to Volunteer

The literature discusses a number a factors that indicate a likelihood of volunteering. These are:

- Recent Volunteer Experience - volunteering itself is seen as a significant determinant of volunteer activity. Thus older people who volunteer are seen not so much as older volunteers but as ‘volunteers who have aged’ (Mutchler, Burr and Caro 2003, 1273). This would suggest getting in early with volunteer recruiting. In a similar vein the Western Australian Government has focussed on promoting volunteering amongst baby boomers as the next generation of older volunteers (Esmond, 2001, 2002, 2004).

- Paid employment – People in paid employment are more likely to volunteer (Warburton and Terry, 2000, 245: ABS, 2001, 13).

Note, however, that a US study indicates that of older people (55-74) who did not have recent volunteer experience, paid-work status appears to be related to commitment to volunteering (Mutchler, Burr and Caro, 2003). Those (aged 55-74) who work part-time, 9 This is supported by the comparison of the ABS and Wilson, Spoehr and Mclean’s (2005) results discussed in footnote 4.
10 Baby boomers are the large number of people born between 1946 and 1963 (Esmond, 2001, 8). Thus in 2005 baby boomers are aged between 42 and 59.
retire, or are not in paid employment and did not previously volunteer contribute more
time to formal volunteering than full time workers (Mutchler, Burr and Caro, 2003,
1285). If this is correct, retirement or going part time in later life can be understood as
a good point at which to encourage older people who do not already volunteer to take
it up.

There is no link between informal volunteering and paid-work status (Mutchler, Burr
and Caro, 2003).

More research needs to be undertaken to understand the relationship between paid
employment and volunteering for older people in Australia.

- Perceptions of volunteering – Older people more likely to volunteer had particular
perceptions around volunteering (Warburton and Terry, 2000, 253-254). They:
  - perceived support for volunteering from those who were important to them
  - perceived volunteering as a behaviour that they could easily accomplish. This may
    be affected by either:
    - confidence in personal ability - organisations may need to direct attention
to demonstrating the ease of some voluntary tasks
    - external factors such as economic and travel difficulties - organisations
may need to be more flexible with respect to volunteer options to
address external factors such as travel difficulties (perhaps including e-
volunteering and compensation for costs).
  - felt that volunteering was a behaviour that they should pursue (i.e., they felt morally
  obliged to volunteer)
  - felt that those around them were also volunteering. This seems to indicate a
connection between social contexts and volunteering (Warburton and Terry, 2000,
255). Thus organisations could ‘focus more on small group volunteer activities in
an effort both to attract more volunteers and to ensure that those who are prepared
to volunteer find the experience more enjoyable’ (Warburton and Terry, 2000, 255).
These authors suggest that the international RSVP (Retired and Senior
Volunteers’ Program) follows such an approach.

**Motivations to volunteer:**

**International literature**

In the international literature, older people’s motivations for volunteering can be
categorized as stemming from both personal and altruistic reasons.

Personal reasons included to:

- Fill a gap or void in life - Managing the transition from paid employment to retirement;
  Coping with a bereavement; Adjusting to children leaving home (Rochester and
  Hutchison, 2002, 24; Smith and Gay, 2005)

- Keep active and involved (Rochester and Hutchison, 2002, 24)
Feel useful, valuable and wanted (Rochester and Hutchison, 2002, 24; Smith and Gay, 2005)

Use ones skills that have been built up over ones (paid and unpaid) working life (Smith and Gay, 2005)

Meet new people and make new friends (Rochester and Hutchison, 2002, 24; Smith and Gay, 2005)

Do something enjoyable and interesting (Rochester and Hutchison, 2002, 24; Smith and Gay, 2005)

Put structure to ones free time (Smith and Gay, 2005)

Enhance personal development: learning new skills and gaining training (Rochester and Hutchison, 2002, 24)\(^1\). Note, however, that in Australia learning new skills and gaining work experience were not popular reasons for older people to volunteer.

Altruistic reasons included to:

- Help others (Rochester and Hutchison, 2002, 24; Omoto, Snyder and Martino, 2000; Smith and Gay, 2005)
- Put something back into society (Rochester and Hutchison, 2002, 24; Omoto, Snyder and Martino, 2000)
- Contribute to fulfilling the needs of older people, which they identified with.

**Australian Context**

In the Australian context, the ABS survey on volunteering (2001, 20) lists a number of factors as reasons for volunteering for the 45-54, 55-64 and 65 and over age groups:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for volunteering</th>
<th>45-54 age group</th>
<th>55-64 age group</th>
<th>65 and over age group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal satisfaction</td>
<td>46.8%</td>
<td>46.6%</td>
<td>50.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help others/community</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>53.2%</td>
<td>54.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To do something worthwhile</td>
<td>31.4%</td>
<td>33.2%</td>
<td>35.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social contact</td>
<td>18.9%</td>
<td>18.5%</td>
<td>27.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal/family involvement</td>
<td>28.7%</td>
<td>19.6%</td>
<td>13.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be active</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
<td>19.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious beliefs</td>
<td>12.4%</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use skills/experience</td>
<td>12.8%</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
<td>8.7%(^12)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Learning new skills and gaining work experience had very little support amongst these age groups and were identified as unreliable (with the exception of the 45-54 age group of which 7.1% gave to learn new skills as a reason for volunteering). Thus, it appears that

\(^{11}\) It should be noted, however, that Rochester and Hutchison (2002, 24) note that there was some disagreement about whether training should be accredited or not. This accords with other research which suggests that older people do not tend to volunteer in order to gain new skills (ABS, 2001, 20)

\(^{12}\) The ABS warns that this statistic should be used with caution (ABS, 2001, 20)
older people in Australia tend to volunteer for reasons to do with community contribution and a sense of making a difference, religious beliefs, to have social contact, to be active and to use ones skills. Organisations wishing to recruit older volunteers may wish to emphasise the contribution volunteering makes to the community as a whole. In particular, a recruiting organisation may need to emphasise how the volunteer activity contributes to the organisation as a whole and how it makes a difference.

At the same time, given that more older people are unemployed than ever before, governments and organisations may need to promote the role volunteering can play in retraining and assisting in re-employment.

Irrespective of motivations for participating, people participated because they had been asked to do so (Rochester and Hutchison, 2002, 25). This is supported by the ABS survey on volunteering which indicates that being asked, knowing someone involved and self involvement in an organisation are the most common ways of becoming involved in volunteering (ABS, 2001, 19).

Baby Boomers

With respect to baby boomers (and this could possibly apply to other age groups too) Esmond (2001, 7) found that motivations for volunteering were as diverse as the number of volunteers. Further, irrespective of the motivations to volunteer, her research indicated that if the organisation was not a professional, well-organised one that consulted and valued volunteers, and offered flexible volunteer opportunities, baby boomers were unlikely to commence or continue volunteer work with that organisation (Esmond, 2001, vi). Esmond summarised seven strategic focus areas captured by the acronym BOOMNET that an organisation needed to address. These are summarised below:

- **Boomers**: understanding the aspirations and characteristics of baby boomers
- **Organised**: organised, professional and well managed organisations for clients as well as volunteers
- **Openness**: open and supportive organisational environment that truly values volunteers. This includes the need for evaluation and feedback (particularly through consultation), the abolition of cliques, support for volunteers, adequate insurance and Occupational Health and Safety and valuing of volunteers throughout the organisation
- **Meaningful**: meaningful, interesting, creative and challenging volunteering opportunities
- **Needs**: fitting the needs of the volunteer not just the organisation
- **Education**: needed, effective, relevant and well presented education such that baby boomers can develop their own skills
- **Time**: recognising the time poor element of baby boomers life and tailoring time specific, short term and flexible volunteer opportunities.
2.6 Barriers to Volunteering

The literature raises a number of barriers to older people volunteering. These can be characterised as stemming from older people’s perceptions and attitudes, practical barriers, cultural barriers, and the policies and practices of organisations.

Perceptions and attitudes

Older people may be reluctant to volunteer because of the following reasons:

- A belief that they cannot perform the volunteer activity due to (Warburton and Terry, 2000, 255; Rochester and Hutchison, 2002, 30)
  - Lack of confidence or self-belief. Thus there is a ‘need to help older volunteers develop confidence in their abilities and recognise the value of their experience and skills’ (Rochester and Hutchison, 2002, 30)
  - External factors such as time constraints, travel and costs. Organisations may need to be more flexible with respect to volunteer options to address external factors such as travel difficulties (perhaps including e-volunteering). Organisations need to be clear in how they intend to facilitate older people volunteering and inform older people of travel assistance and cost reimbursement

- Lack of understanding or knowledge of what volunteering entails (Rochester and Hutchison, 2002, 30). There needs to be promotion of the broad experiences available through volunteering.

- A sense of not fitting the picture of a volunteer (Rochester and Hutchison, 2002, 30). The stereotype of the middle aged, white, middle class woman volunteer was seen as being a deterrent to those who did not fit that picture. Thus there is a need to promote the diverse range of volunteer activities and emphasis the diverse people who volunteer.

Practical barriers

There are a number of practical barriers that may impede older volunteering, including:

- Functional health problems - older people’s functional ability levels can provide barriers to older people volunteering (Li and Ferraro, 2005; Rochester and Hutchison, 2002, 30). The USA tends to have an ethos of adapting volunteer activities to fit the ability of the older volunteer (Baldock, 2000)

- Monetary constraints - out of pocket expenses for transport, telephone calls, postage and stationary need to be met in full. Further, payment should be prompt and older people should not have to ask (Rochester and Hutchison, 2002, 31)

The Public Transport Ticketing Program
The Public Transport Ticketing Program has been developed to reduce the cost of peak hour public transport for volunteers of State Government hospitals who are current concession or pension holders.

(Excerpt from Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group 2005)

- Mobility - this may involve difficulty with travelling for health reasons, no car, or not being able to drive at all or at night. Further older people are less likely to travel in bad weather or to areas where they feared crime (Rochester and Hutchison, 2002, 31)

There are three ways of addressing these issues (Rochester and Hutchison, 2002, 31):

- Provide transport for those who need it
- Plan activities in order to minimize travel or in the day time when buses run regularly and fares are cheaper
- Offer volunteer activities that do not require travel from home such as through the internet or email. The UK RSVP program of knitting from home would address this issue for some volunteers. However, it should be noted that there is some indication that volunteering that provides a social element to it is more beneficial to older people (Onyx and Warburton, 2003, 68). The risk with e-volunteering is that isolation could prevail without the face to face contact.

Cultural barriers

It has been discussed above that people from non-English speaking backgrounds or Indigenous people may volunteer in different ways or find volunteering in mainstream organisations difficult. More needs to be learnt about volunteering by older Indigenous and non-English speaking background people and what barriers they face.

The policies and practices of volunteer-involving organisations: age-discrimination

Whilst no substantial research on age discrimination and older volunteering in Australia was identified (see also Volunteering Australia, 2002), research in England indicates that ‘ageism’ is a serious issue there. A 2002 survey in the UK indicates that 60% of respondent organisations had a fixed retirement age for volunteers (Volunteering Australia, 2002, 5). Further, anecdotal evidence reported by Volunteering Australia indicates that discrimination of volunteers on the basis of age is occurring in some organisations (Volunteering Australia, 2002, 6).

In England the review of the HOOVI projects found that the policies and practices of some organisations involved ageism (Rochester and Hutchison, 2002, 27-29). The most common examples of ageism were:

- An upper age limit for volunteers
  - It was felt that difficulties with gaining insurance for those over 70 (especially drivers) was used as an excuse for imposing an age limit for volunteers. More
effort needed to be made by organisations to obtain alternative insurance (Rochester and Hutchison, 2002, 27)

- It was also felt that organisations tended to hide behind age limits rather than deal with individual older volunteers who were no longer contributing in a meaningful way. Rather organisations should 'make an assessment of the individual volunteer’s capacity to contribute to the work; to reshape his or her role where that was appropriate; and to explain why it was necessary that he or she might now have to retire' (Rochester and Hutchison, 2002, 28)

- A bias towards younger volunteers manifested either by
  
  - an assumption that older people were too frail to volunteer. However, individuals need to be assessed on their individual capacity. Further, volunteer activities can be tailored so that frailer people can undertake them
  
  - that it was not worth investing in training older volunteers because they would not be around for long (Rochester and Hutchison, 2002, 28). Yet it has been found that older people tend to stay longer with an organisation (Rochester and Hutchison, 2002, 28; Onyx and Warburton, 2003, 65). On these grounds it would be worthwhile investing in training older volunteers.

- A failure to offer older volunteers a sufficiently wide range of activities. (Rochester and Hutchison, 2002, 27).

Offering older volunteers uninteresting, undemanding and a narrow range of tasks is another facet of ageist practices. Organisations often tended to assume that older people ‘were content with undemanding tasks like making the tea or arranging the flowers; that they preferred to be involved with other older people; and that they wanted to continue to do things they had done in their working life’ (Rochester and Hutchison, 2002, 28). Rather, the HOOVI projects demonstrate that older people can and do undertake a wide variety of tasks.

Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) was engaged in a five-year project to recruit volunteers who were more representative of the UK population. Its project, funded under the Initiative, involved:

- tackling global disadvantage by realising older people’s potential
- conducting research to establish how best to attract people who were over 50 and
- what the barriers to their recruitment might be
- revising VSO’s recruitment procedures and literature
- organising promotional events and producing publicity materials.

VSO’s project staff felt that, as a result of their work, the agency was "now more obviously inclusive" (although the staff group remained predominantly made up of younger people). There were important lessons to be learned from VSO’s experience. If a major change of this kind was to be successful it required:

- getting key people "on board" at an early stage
- making sure the organisation as a whole was committed to the change; there was no use setting up an "older persons" unit when its agenda did not fit with that of the rest of the organisation

- realising that changing one aspect of the process was not enough; the whole approach needed to be rethought and redesigned

- institutionalising and embedding the changes.

(Excerpt taken from Rochester and Hutchison, 2002, 29)

The HOOVI review (Rochester and Hutchison, 2002, 29) also found that there was ageism within agencies that were involved with collaborative projects such as staff of residential homes, sheltered housing, day care centres and schoolteachers.

### 2.7 Legal Issues

**Legal protection from age-discrimination**

There is little legal protection against age discrimination for volunteers in Australia. Volunteering Australia has as a principle the inclusion of volunteers in anti-discrimination practices. This can be seen in their Principles of Volunteering, Volunteer Rights and in their National Standards (Volunteering Australia, 2002, 4). However, none of these are legally binding (Volunteering Australia, 2002, 4).

The Commonwealth *Age Discrimination Act* 2004 does not appear to apply to volunteering. Unlike the South Australian legislation (referred to below) the Age Discrimination Act 2004 does not include unpaid work in its definition of employment. Voluntary bodies can discriminate with respect to their membership and the provision of services to its membership but not in the provision of services to non-members. But this would appear to apply more to the situation of discriminating with respect to providing goods and services, than with respect to deploying volunteers. Unless deploying volunteers can be seen as a “service” provided by voluntary bodies, it would appear that the commonwealth legislation does not apply to volunteers. Thus, discrimination against volunteers on the basis of age is not illegal under the federal legislation.

In South Australia the *Equal Opportunity Act* 1984 (SA) prohibits discrimination on the grounds of age (Part 5A). This applies to those applying for employment and to employees. The act defines employees as including unpaid workers and employment as including unpaid work. Thus, at face value, the Equal Opportunity Act 1984 (SA) would appear to prohibit discrimination against volunteers because of their age.

It is recommended that legal advice be sought to clarify this situation. The situation should be made clear to volunteer organisations.

**Insurance**

There is a notable exception to this Equal Opportunity Act 1984 (SA) prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of age: that of insurance. Provided there is actuarial or statistical data to support discrimination on the ground of age, then such discrimination is permissible. This may create difficulties for the organisations that deploy volunteers given
that they cannot deny older volunteers, but deploying them may increase insurance premiums.

In Australia, anecdotal evidence suggests that personal accident and public liability insurance can be difficult to obtain for older volunteers, constituting a barrier to older volunteering (Volunteering Australia, 2002, 6). Further, a Human Rights and Equal Opportunity (HREOC) report into age discrimination reported submissions that raised insurance as a barrier to older volunteers:

In one case, a group of retired workers in a small country town offered to assist the state government to keep their railway station open by volunteering to build up the existing platform to the required height. However, their offer of voluntary assistance was refused because, due to their age, they could not be covered by the government’s insurance provisions (submission 21, H J Holcombe).

(Excerpt from HREOC, 2000, 84)

Potential volunteers of any age that are unfairly deterred will not attempt to engage in volunteering again in the future, thereby denying both themselves and the wider community the contribution that volunteering brings (Volunteering Australia, 2002, 9)

**Occupational Health and Safety (OHS)**

Volunteers are covered by occupational health and safety legislation. A recent document on OHS and the ageing workforce suggests that:

Since ageing is an individual process, one centralized intervention program is not feasible. Individuals need to be assessed for their work ability, allowing mature workers’ strengths to be utilised, while compensating for any age related impairment.

(Office of ASCC, 2005, iii)

This approach of individual assessment should also apply to older volunteers. Further legal advice should be sought on the relationship between older volunteers and OHS obligations. OHS standards should not stand in the way of older people volunteering.

**Pensions and Newstart Payment**

Older people may be recipients of a pension or Newstart allowance through Centrelink. This may depend on age. Men aged over 65 and women, depending on their date of birth, aged between 60 and 65, can receive the aged pension provided they meet the residence and financial requirements (Centrelink web site). There are limits on the amount of income pensioners can earn before they receive deductions to their pensions. There are no restrictions or incentives for voluntary work.

Alternatively, older people may be recipients of a Newstart payment. These people need to perform a mutual obligation activity. This can include voluntary work. There are strict requirements for people aged under 50 years old to be eligible to include volunteering. Most notably they need to be able to demonstrate that the volunteer activity will improve their employment prospects. In contrast, people aged over 50 years can include approved

---

13 There are also carers’ payments and allowances available through Centrelink, which some older people may access. However, this research project does not directly address caring as a voluntary activity.
volunteer work in satisfaction of their mutual obligation without demonstrating a link to paid employment. In such cases people must volunteer more than 20 hours per week (telephone communication with Centrelink, 18 Oct 2005). Further, the volunteer activity must be approved by Centrelink. It must be for a “charitable welfare or community organisation that is run on a not for profit basis with the objective of providing services or assistance to the community” (telephone communication). It should be noted that there is some debate as to whether voluntary work performed under mutual obligation requirements provides the community and personal benefits that other voluntary work provides as there is a degree of coercion to the activity (Cordingley, 2000, 78-79).

**Superannuation**

There does not appear to be any intrinsic difficulty with volunteering and receiving superannuation. However, issues may arise in cases where older people wish to use volunteering as a step out of paid employment whereby they combine part time employment and volunteering. An increase in the preservation age is being phased in from 55 to 60. Hence people aged below 60 will not be eligible for their superannuation, thus will need to work. Financial pressures may mean that these people will not be able to afford to combine part time work and volunteering. Older volunteering may suffer as a consequence.

However, since July 2005 changes have been implemented to encourage phased retirement. Thus people are able to draw on their superannuation as a non-commutable income when they have not retired permanently, provided they have reached the preservation age. As a consequence, they could work part time and combine income and super payments (Australian Government Super Choice website). This could facilitate the combination of part-time work and volunteering for those older people who wish to do so.

Thus, the changes to superannuation may facilitate volunteering for those people over the preservation age but make it more difficult for those under the preservation age. The relationship between superannuation eligibility and volunteering needs to be explored further.

### 2.8 Remaining in Volunteer Organisations

Older volunteers tend to have a higher level of commitment to volunteering; they stay in an organisation longer and commit longer hours (Onyx and Warburton, 2003, 65). However, some of the literature suggests that older people are more confident to leave unsatisfactory volunteering experiences (Rochester and Hutchison, 2002, 38). And this certainly seems to be the case with baby boomers (Esmond, 2001, 13). Thus, organisations need to know what factors contribute in retaining older volunteers.

The English review of the HOOVI initiative found that older people stayed for a number of reasons (Rochester and Hutchison, 2002, 25-26):

- "keeping busy": older volunteers wanted to be active
- the intrinsic worth of the activity: older volunteers wanted to do something that they felt was useful and valuable. This was not only a question of the value of the contribution
of the individual volunteer but also the quality of the achievements of the project as a whole

- flexibility in the demands made on older people’s time: older volunteers wanted organisations to be flexible in involving them. Holidays and family commitments were important to older people and they needed to be able to fit their volunteering commitments around them. They also felt that their contribution to the organisation might need to change over time in line with changes in their interests, commitment and capacity

Volunteer San Diego, California

Volunteer San Diego’s Flexible Volunteer Program offers a calendar of more than 70 projects a month which take place outside of traditional working hours, during lunchtimes, evenings and weekends. The program is unique in that it requires no ongoing commitment from volunteers who can serve once a week, once a month or just once in a while. Each month, flex volunteers feed the homeless, tutor K-12 students, clean up beaches and neighborhoods, provide companionship to seniors and much more. While the program is intended for adults of all ages, baby boomers and older adults have been particularly drawn to this program. Volunteer San Diego believes that by offering flexible opportunities to pre-retirees, they will choose to make volunteering a central component of their retirement years.

(Excerpt from Foundations of Light, 2004, 7)

- willingness to give older people “real responsibility”: many older volunteers thrived on autonomy which allowed them to create and develop their contribution to the organisation rather than merely slotting into a preconceived role

the local Red Cross in Montgomery County, MD found that they could no longer find volunteers to help with administrative duties, but they were able to find two qualified volunteers to co-direct an emergency preparedness program. With the $50,000 that normally would have paid the salary of this full-time position, $25,000 was used to hire administrative support and the remainder was used for other services.

(Excerpt taken from Points of Light Foundation, 2004, 8)

- opportunities to become involved in the policy-making of the organisation: older volunteers wanted to be consulted and to feel that their contributions to decision making were valued

- opportunities for learning and personal growth; older volunteers wanted to develop existing interests, engage with new ones and learn new skills

- opportunities for social interaction; older volunteers, often isolated at home, valued the opportunity to meet and socialise with other people

- valuing the contribution of older volunteers: older volunteers wanted respect, and the way they were treated had a major bearing on their commitment, how long they stayed and how much they contributed. Most appreciated being thanked and welcomed public acknowledgement of their contribution. However many older
volunteers were not used to being valued and some gained confidence in their experience and skills which enabled them to make major contributions to the activities with which they were involved.

Organisations wishing to retain older volunteers need to ensure they provide these experiences.
3 What is Happening Elsewhere?
Government Policy and Initiatives

This chapter addresses some examples of older volunteer programs interstate and overseas and what can be learnt from these.

3.1 Elsewhere in Australia

In a 2003 review of the literature on volunteering and health among older people it was observed that there has been little political or policy attention in Australia on older people and volunteering (Onyx and Warburton, 2003, 65). However, the authors noted that the National Strategy on Ageing has espoused community participation as positively impacting on healthy ageing and that some States have espoused and promoted healthy ageing (Queensland is provided as an example) (Onyx and Warburton, 2003, 65).

The Federal Government has a National Strategy for an Ageing Australia (Commonwealth of Australia, 2002). One of the goals of the Strategy is that ‘public, private and community infrastructure is available to support older Australians and their participation in society.’ An action to support this goal is ‘encouraging business, service providers and the community to recognise the skills, knowledge and capacity that older Australians can bring to the paid employment and volunteer sectors’ (Commonwealth of Australia, 2002, 34). Surprisingly, this is the only mention of volunteering in a policy action context in the strategy.

Some Australian States also have an active ageing policy. The extent to which volunteering features varies from State to State from quite a central role\textsuperscript{14} to not being mentioned at all\textsuperscript{15}.

\textsuperscript{14} For example see the NSW policy, New South Wales Healthy Ageing Framework 1998-2003, which has as one of its objectives ‘Increased participation of older people in the workforce, education, leisure and volunteering’ (Ageing and Disability Department, NSW , 1998) (this is still on the department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care, NSW, website and is the most current policy (telephone conversation with DADHC, 10 November 2005). A new policy is to be launched soon. It is currently awaiting Ministerial approval.

\textsuperscript{15} See for example The Qld Policy Our Shared Future: Queensland’s Framework for Ageing 2000-2004. (this is still on the Department of Communities website and thus is assumed to still be current policy)
It is difficult to find any specific policies or programs directed at older volunteering in the Australian States. Some States have commissioned reports into older volunteering. Notably, Western Australia has commissioned three reports into different aspects of baby boomer volunteering (Esmond, 2001, 2002, 2004) and New South Wales funded a report into older people and volunteering (Heart beat trends, 2001). Nevertheless, little can be found on specific programs or initiatives that have arisen out of these reports, with the exception of Western Australia.

Western Australia stands out in Australia with respect to Older People and Volunteers. The WA Government has commissioned ongoing research into baby boomers and volunteering. Further, Volunteering Western Australia’s website indicates that it offers services specifically for seniors and has a senior services manager (Volunteering Western Australia website). Volunteering Queensland runs a RSVP program (Volunteering Queensland website).

At any rate, older volunteering has not received nearly as much attention nor funding in Australia as it has internationally.

### 3.2 The International Community

The international community recognises the importance of older volunteering, both to the individual and to society as a whole. There is a belief older volunteering should be valued and promoted by countries and that any barriers to it should be removed. The United Nations General Assembly has resolved that:

> Older persons should be able to seek and develop opportunities for service to the community and to serve as volunteers in positions appropriate to their interests and capabilities. (United Nations Principles for Older Persons, UN General Assembly Resolution 46/91 of 16 December 1991)

Further, delegates to the World Assembly on Ageing in 2002 recommended that countries:

> …create an enabling environment for volunteering at all ages, including public recognition, and facilitate the participation of older persons who may have little or no access to the benefits of engaging in volunteering. (United Nations website)

In addition the European Union is directing attention to active ageing amongst older people, including a focus on older volunteering.

Many Western countries run a Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP), an age senior specific program for older volunteers. The UK and the US have such programs, more of which is said below. Some Australian States also run such programs. However, South Australia does not.

### 3.3 Specific Examples from Other Countries

A sample of countries have been examined more closely for examples of their approach to older people and volunteers. The countries looked at (the USA and UK) have been chosen because of their prominence as well as the large extent of government support of older volunteering.
In the United Kingdom volunteering decreases after 50 years of age (Smith and Gay, 2005). Over the last decade the UK has implemented a number of strategies to promote and support older volunteering. In 1999-2003 the Home Office Older Volunteer Initiative (HOOVI) provided funding of 1.476 million pounds to 26 projects aimed at improving the number and quality of the opportunities for people aged 50 or over to volunteer and involve themselves in the community (Rochester and Hutchison, 2002, vii). The specific aims of the initiative were to:

- "instil the habit" (to increase the commitment of employee and retiree-supported volunteering)
- "bring down the barriers" (to remove the practical barriers to the recruitment of older volunteers)
- "catch the attention" (to ensure that volunteering opportunities were seen by older people and were attractive to them)
- "match the needs of the community" (to promote volunteering opportunities by focusing on specific community issues where there was a clear role for voluntary activity).

(Rochester and Huchison, 2002, 1-2)

The HOOVI projects covered a broad range of areas. Some projects, often run by volunteer agencies or research bodies, were directed at conducting research on issues such as age discrimination and volunteering, mentoring in government departments, guidelines for increasing the involvement of black older volunteers, good practice for local authorities, and good practice for intergenerational mentoring. Other projects were directed more at creating opportunities and recruiting older volunteers. These again crossed a broad range of areas from older volunteers working with young offenders, older volunteers from ethnic minority groups befriending the isolated and elderly, recruiting older volunteers from Asian communities to act as senior health mentors, recruiting older volunteers to introduce isolated older people to IT applications such as the internet, recruiting older volunteers to befriend people with dementia, older volunteers with arthritis assisting other arthritis sufferers, increasing older volunteering from the business community, recruiting older volunteers as advocates for younger people, identifying where there is a need for volunteers through contacting other organisations and encouraging often excluded older people to volunteer, recruiting and training retired union members to provide mentoring, representation and advice to voluntary organisations (Rochester and Hutchison, 2002, 59-64). HOOVI also provided funding for a travelling photographic exhibition depicting the variety of volunteer activities undertaken by older people. Overall the initiative assisted in advancing knowledge about older people and volunteering and contributed to the identification and dissemination of good practice as well as promoting older volunteering (Rochester and Hutchison, 2002, vii).

The 2002 review of the HOOVI projects made the following findings (Rochester and Hutchison, 2002, vii):

- organisations whose mission or purpose is to promote the well-being of older people have a considerable advantage in involving older people as volunteers
the extent to which volunteering is a recognised and central feature of an organisation’s work is an important factor in its ability to involve older volunteers quickly and effectively

older people from black and minority ethnic communities with little or no tradition of formal volunteering are more likely to volunteer within their own communities than in "mainstream" organisations

the contribution of older people is likely to be especially valuable in working with frail and isolated older people, intergenerational activities with school-age children and in helping other people with long-term health problems to manage their condition.’

Some of the limitations of the Home Office’s initiative that the South Australian Government could learn from if they intended on creating a similar initiative were that (Rochester and Hutchison, 2002, ix):

- the funding was for an ‘aggregate of bids for funding’ rather than ‘being systematically developed to address a coherent set of aims and objectives’

- ‘much of the programme was made up of short term and small-scale projects with a limited capacity to lay strong foundations for continuing activity’

- ‘to a great extent the individual projects operated in isolation and had little opportunity to compare experiences’

The review of the Home Office’s initiative suggested three specific areas of policy and provision that could involve older volunteers (Rochester and Hutchison, 2002, xi):

- as providers of services to other older people

- in intergenerational activities with schools

- as participants or leaders in developing active communities and neighbourhood renewal.

This would suggest that government or the office for volunteers should establish intergovernmental links with old age agencies, the Education Department and schools, local government and the Department for Communities and Families.

As well as the HOOVI projects, the English Government funded in 2002, through a grant, the independent non-profit company, Experience Corps, whose objective is to encourage older people between 50 and 65 to ‘offer their skills and experience to benefit others in their local communities’ (Rochester and Hutchison, 2002, xi) (see also Experience Corp web site). Its aim was to recruit 250,000 older volunteers in three years (Smith and Gay, 2005).

Further, in 2005 the home office funded a Volunteering Initiative for the Third Age (VITA) which is organised by the volunteering charity WRVS and is directed at increasing the numbers of volunteers aged over 65 (VITA home page)
VITA aims to promote the value and impact of older volunteers and to increase the number of over 65s volunteering by removing barriers across the voluntary and community sector. We aim to promote best practice within organisations and encourage older people to value their skills enough to want to use them within their communities.

- VITA provides a national focal point for older volunteering.
- VITA works to provide support and information to organisations who want to recruit older people.
- VITA raises the profile of older volunteers and promotes their value to voluntary and community organisations.
- VITA identifies barriers to recruiting older volunteers and works to remove them.

The VITA website also provides links to what it calls ‘older volunteer-friendly’ groups that offer volunteering experiences.

The UK has extensive Retired and Seniors Volunteer Program (RSVP) programs running throughout the country (see CSV’s RSVP website). The RSVP program offers opportunities in the following areas: trying to create opportunities for people with disabilities; to knit garments and blankets for hospitals, emergency services, and orphanages around the world; to volunteer in health and social care, schools and the cultural sector (CSV’s Senior Volunteers website). There are also other older volunteering initiatives that are easily accessible through the Internet (see, for example, the WRVS website, CSV’s senior volunteers website, and REACH website).

The year 2005 is the year of volunteers in the UK. In addition the month of March was designated Older People month with the purpose of promoting volunteering to people over 50 (Home Office, Community and Race website). A number of events were organised for this period.

CSV’s Retired and Senior Volunteer Programme (RSVP) launched a video, ‘Retire into Action’, highlighting volunteering opportunities for the over-fifties. RSVP and Age Concern organised a photographic storyboard exhibition, showcasing photographs celebrating the lives and history of older volunteers. And Home Office Minister Fiona Mactaggart attended the launch of ‘Volunteering Initiative for the Third Age’ (VITA), a two-year initiative organised by volunteering charity WRVS, to increase the numbers of volunteers aged over 65.

On the ground older volunteers across Britain have also been taking part in the ‘Big Knit’, which is organised by RSVP and Age Concern. Volunteer Adele Hall, 79, explains what the Big Knit is all about: “We knit trauma teddies for children at home and abroad, as well as premature baby clothes,” she says. “The group meets once a month but we knit on our own at home as well.”

(Excerpt from the Home Office News Archive website)

Age discrimination is a prominent issue with respect to older people and volunteering in the UK. Volunteering England has a Code of Practice on Age Discrimination in Volunteering (See Volunteering England’s Campaigns website)
The USA

The USA has a large volunteer community and the government holds high expectations of volunteering (Baldock, 2000, 89). The US has a National policy for older volunteers which has run in different forms for over 30 years (Baldock, 2000, 89). This is now run through Senior Corps, which is a program of the Corporation for National and Community Service, an independent federal agency. Senior Corps offers a number of different programs. Its website summarizes these as follows:

- The Foster Grandparent Program connects volunteers aged 60 and over with children and young people with exceptional needs. Volunteers mentor, support, and help some of the most vulnerable children in the United States.

- The Senior Companion Program brings together volunteers aged 60 and over with adults in their community who have difficulty with the simple tasks of day-to-day living. Companions help out on a personal level by assisting with shopping and light chores, interacting with doctors, or just making a friendly visit.

- RSVP connects volunteers aged 55 and over with service opportunities in their communities that match their skills and availability. From building houses to immunizing children, from enhancing the capacity of non-profit organizations to improving and protecting the environment, RSVP volunteers put their unique talents to work to make a difference.

(Foster Grandparents and Senior Companions are for over 60 year olds and provide companionship, care, friendship and advocacy to two or three clients per week in their own home or day care facilities (Baldock, 2000, 89).

The website also lists the benefits that older people get from participating in these programs. For example the Senior Corps website lists the benefits of the RSVP program in the following way:

**Benefits:** RSVP volunteers are able to put their unique talents to work for community and faith-based organizations that are significant to them. In addition, they receive the following benefits:

- Pre-service orientation;
- On-the-job training from the agency or organization where they are placed;
- Supplemental insurance while on duty.

(Senior Corps programs (RSVP) web site)

The benefits for the Foster Grandparents program are listed as:
Benefits: Foster Grandparents are able to make strong emotional connections with children and get a great deal of satisfaction from making a difference in their lives. In addition, they receive the following:

- Pre-service and monthly training sessions
- Reimbursement for transportation;
- Some meals during service;
- An annual physical;
- Accident and liability insurance while on duty; and
- Income-eligible Foster Grandparents also receive a modest, tax-free stipend to offset the cost of volunteering.

(Senior Corps’ programs (FG) web site)

A similar list of benefits is included in the Senior Companions program.

Thus, issues of training, skill gaining and insurance are all issues that the US has dealt with.

Unlike Australia where volunteering is defined as unpaid work, in the US stipends are frequently paid to volunteers. RSVP volunteers tend not to receive a stipend (Baldock, 2000, 89) whereas stipends are paid for Foster Grandparenting and Senior Companionship. This may be antithetical to the Australian concept of volunteering.

The Senior Corps website also features best practice examples. This is something that the Office for Volunteers or Volunteer SA Inc. could undertake. The State Government could promote best practice.

In 2001, 72% of Volunteer Centres throughout the USA actively engaged people over 50 as volunteers (Point of Lights Foundation, 2004, 12). This was predominantly through Senior Corps programs. Other program models included Board Banks where older adult professionals are placed on board of directors; programs for older adults to tutor youth; partnership programs between Volunteer Centres and non-profit management consultancy organisations; and sponsored older adult service-learning programs (Points of Light Foundation, 2004, 12)

There are numerous organisations throughout the USA that run older volunteer programs. These are easily accessible through various websites (see for example the websites for Administration on Aging, Points of Light Foundation and Senior Corps).

Further, with respect to age discrimination, agencies that run programs subsidised through the federal Government are required to adapt their volunteer programs to the abilities of the older volunteer as their physical abilities change or they become fragile. Otherwise they would be seen to be in breach of the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990) (Baldock, 2000, 90).

The month of May was older volunteers month in the USA.
4 Issues and Trends

4.1 Mature-age employment, unemployment, and retirement

A developing area of interest is the relationship between older people’s volunteering, workforce participation and retirement. Of the research that did address this issue, Warburton and Terry (2000, 245) suggest that older people in paid employment are more likely to volunteer. And a US study indicates that for people (55-74) without recent volunteering experience, paid-work status affects commitment to volunteering such that those without recent volunteer experience who worked part-time, had retired recently, or were not in paid employment contribute more time to formal volunteering than full time workers (Mutchler, Burr and Caro, 2003, 1285). Further, a recent UK report suggests that whilst ‘lifelong’ volunteers make up the majority of volunteers, other ‘trigger’ volunteers take up volunteering at a time of transition such as on retirement or when a spouse dies (Smith and Gay, 2005). If this is true in South Australia, it would suggest that volunteering could be promoted as an option at the time that people retire or go part time.

The South Australian Government needs to encourage volunteer activity as being one of the areas that retired people put their time and energy. In England one HOOVI project produced a good practice guide for local authorities, encouraging the incorporation of volunteering in any preparation for retirement programs (Rochester and Hutchison, 2002, 8).

The NCV’s MAVERIC project developed a widely-disseminated good practice guide for local authorities. It “proposes the incorporation of volunteering in the structure of retirement preparation for local authority staff” and aims to demonstrate “how supporting volunteering is an essential part of any personnel officer’s toolkit” (NCV, 2000). The guide was launched at four seminars for local authority personnel officers held in York, Exeter, London and Birmingham. Altogether 5,000 copies have been distributed to people working in local authorities and organisations which promote volunteering – including the members of NAVB, the regional organisations of the Retired and Senior Volunteers Programme (RSVP) and the Retired Executives Action Clearing House (REACH). The guide has also been publicised in the Local Government Chronicle, Equalities Watch (the organ of the employers’ association for local government) and Volunteering magazine.

(Excerpt from Rochester and Hutchison, 2002, 8)
Australians tend to hold a positive image of retirement as a time for recreation, travel and leisure (Baldock, 2000, 88). Nevertheless, employment is strongly related to social capital through its establishment and maintenance of social networks and trust (The Smith Family, 2005, 10). Social capital can in turn improve well-being, health and socio-economic status (The Smith Family, 2005, 10). Thus, maintaining or establishing new social networks should be encouraged in those leaving employment. Volunteering is one way of achieving this.

Esmond (2001, 29) suggests that ‘volunteering can assist in combating the three issues that impact on people during their first two years of retirement: (i) dealing with loneliness and the loss of social contacts; (ii) the need to feel that they are contributing and having a sense of belonging; and (iii) developing and engaging in purposeful activities’ (Esmond, 2001, 30).

A recent UK report (Smith and Gay, 2005) suggests that retirement can mean a loss of ‘time structure, social contact, collective effort or purpose, social identity or status and regular activity’ (Smith and Gay, 2005). For some, volunteering can provide some compensation for this. Others who volunteer may be looking for something new and different. There are a number of similarities and differences in volunteering and work that could be emphasised by any initiatives directed at older people:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Similar</th>
<th>Different</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Having discrete duties and responsibilities</td>
<td>Culture and Ethos of voluntary organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solving problems</td>
<td>Lower level of stress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devoting energy</td>
<td>Quality of commitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using specific expertise</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Taken from Smith and Gay, 2005)

Volunteer-involving organisations may need to focus on what volunteering provides retirees in comparison to paid work. That is, what would remain the same such as structured time and working in a team and what might be different such as a more relaxed culture.

However, it should be noted that those with recent volunteering experience are the most likely to volunteer (Mutchler, Burr and Caro, 2003, 1287). Similarly, in the UK lifelong volunteers make up the majority of volunteers (Smith and Gay, 2005). This would suggest that volunteering should be promoted to the next generation of older people so as to ‘get them started’. This would mean promoting volunteering amongst baby boomers, as Western Australia does (Esmond, 2001, 2002, 2004).

Thus, volunteering should be promoted to both pre-retirees and post-retirees.

Volunteering could be viewed as relating to workforce participation in two ways:

- As a transition out of the paid workforce towards retirement (Smith and Gay, 2005) - volunteering by older people could be seen as an exit strategy whereby some combination of volunteering and (part-time) work could be used to facilitate the transition to retirement. Those people wanting to start ‘winding down’ to retirement may be happier to delay full retirement if they could combine a level of part-time paid
employment and volunteer activity. This would achieve the twofold aims of the Government of delaying retirement age and increasing volunteer activity.

- As a step into paid employment (Age Concern, 2005, 31) - older people who lose their jobs tend to be the longest unemployed or to leave the employment sector altogether. Volunteering here could be used as a way for these people to re-skill and maintain social networks and self-esteem so that they can re-enter the workforce. However, it needs to be noted that older volunteers tended not to count training and skills acquisition as a motivator for volunteering (ABS, 2001, 20). This side of volunteering would need to be promoted by government and volunteer-involving organisations. Also, an emphasis could be placed on the maintenance of social networks.

Both these approaches to volunteering and paid employment promote the retention of older people in employment and promote volunteering.

A recent UK study particularly emphasises the role of volunteering in the transition to retirement (Smith and Gay, 2005). In particular, it emphasises that retirement could be seen in terms of ‘phased retirement’ such that workers are provided (paid) time off during the week to volunteer (Smith and Gay, 2005).

Promoting volunteering through pre-retirement courses tended to have a limited success in the UK (Smith and Gay, 2005). Nevertheless, it has been suggested that post-retirement programs could be run 6 months into retirement which could promote volunteering at a time when the initial euphoria of retirement may be subsiding (Smith and Gay, 2005).

The federal Government has a policy of promoting mature age employment. The Mature Age Employment and Workplace Strategy (MAEWS), announced in the 2004-05 Budget, “seeks to improve the labour force participation of mature age Australians as a key strategy for managing the impact of demographic change” (Jobwise website (no.2)). Jobwise, managed by the Working Age Policy Group of the Australian Government, Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, is the website dedicated to facilitating mature age employment. It includes a list of employer champions who have mature age employment policies. This could also include reference to volunteering. Further, there could be a website directed at increasing older volunteering. This could similarly promote companies who assist in promoting older volunteering and organisation champions who promote and support older volunteering.

The South Australian Government’s Population Policy, mentioned earlier, encourages older people to work past their retirement years (Government of South Australia, 2004, 15). The reasons given for this are to maintain the economy and to ‘help people stay active and continue to use their skills and knowledge’ (Government of South Australia, 2004, 15). Volunteering should be included in this scenario. It achieves all those outcomes. Further, as we saw above, volunteering could be used to complement the goal of increased work-force participation both by using it as an exit strategy and as an entrance strategy.

However, it should be noted that in the Securities Institute’s Submission to the Productivity Commission’s report into the economic consequences of an ageing population it was suggested that a focus on increasing labour force participation of older people may result in a decrease in formal and informal volunteering (Productivity Commission, 2005, 94). More needs to be understood about the relationship between workforce participation and volunteer activity in older people in South Australia.
Volunteering intersects with a number of the areas highlighted as needing attention in the South Australian Population Policy. For example the policy highlights the following areas as needing attention to support those choosing to stay in paid work past retirement age (Government of South Australia, 2004, 15):

- retirement income arrangements including pensions, taxation and superannuation
- enabling older workers to maintain or upgrade their skills
- improving community and business attitudes to older workers
- workplace flexibility to support the needs of older workers.

Promoting volunteering as a means of upgrading skills links with the focus on enabling older workers to maintain and upgrade their skills. This also links with the South Australian Government's *south australia works* policy. This also includes ‘Experience Works’ as one of its priority areas (Government of South Australia, DFFEEST, 6). This is directed at providing more opportunities for people aged over 40. This includes maintaining and updating older workers skills. Volunteering could compliment this strategy by providing avenues for updating older workers skills.

The focus on supporting workplace flexibility, and relatedly balancing work-life commitments (Government of South Australia, 2004, 14) creates space for older peoples other interests. Volunteering could be included in these. Balancing older people’s work-life commitments can contribute to older people’s transition from work to retirement (Government of South Australia, 2004, 14). Volunteering could be one of the options that a balanced work-life creates space for. If people are provided the time to pursue other interests, they may remain in employment longer.

If older people wish to combine paid employment and volunteering, then questions of superannuation, pension and tax arise. None of these should impede participation in voluntary work. The South Australian Government's policy strategy of removing financial barriers to older people remaining in work, such as changes to the public sector superannuation schemes and its review of the cessation of work cover at age 65 (Government of South Australia, 2004, 16), will assist in those people pursuing phased retirement and wanting to include volunteering in this stage of life. The recently introduced changes to superannuation that allow for older people to access their super funds once they have reached the preservation age, irrespective of their employment status, may facilitate people wishing to work part time and volunteer part time. Further legal advice needs to be sought with respect to the impact these areas have on volunteering.

Business and community attitudes are also relevant in older volunteering combined with older working. Businesses can benefit from the maintenance of corporate knowledge that older workers hold. The review of England’s Home Office Older Volunteers Initiative emphasises the role that volunteering by employees and former employees can play (Rochester and Huchison, 2002, xi). Corporate volunteering, whereby employers have policies encouraging employee volunteering, could also encourage this approach of paced or ‘phased’ retirement. Governments may need to fund phased retirement programs in smaller businesses (Smith and Gay, 2005).
4.2 E’Volunteering

Online volunteering allows people to volunteer from home or work. This type of volunteering reduces the amount of time wasted in travel to and from volunteering and allows for flexibility with respect to when the volunteer activity is undertaken. This may be particularly appealing to the time-poor baby boomers (Esmond, 2001, 27-28).

Online volunteering also reduces difficulties associated with the costs of travel. Some older people may find this cost inhibitive, particularly in rural areas. Thus e’volunteering may remove some barriers to volunteering.

**Dark Horse Venture: Inside Out Projects**

One of the projects brought together older people and school children by e-mail. The older people developed skills in using the computer and the children learned about recent social history. The children enjoyed reading what the older people wrote and wanted to maintain contact with them. They also felt that they "understood old people better" since taking part in the project and valued them more as a group within the local community.

(Excerpt from Rochester and Hutchison, 2002, 31)

However, it needs to be noted that a review article on volunteering and health among older volunteers found that ‘the positive effects of volunteering appeared to be strongest for those volunteering roles that involved face-to-face, meaningful interaction between client and volunteer’ (Onyx and Warburton, 2003, 68).

4.3 Corporate volunteering

Corporate volunteering is where private bodies or public sector employers provide release time for employees to volunteer. This is seen as beneficial to the employing body as it encourages teamwork, high morale, and increases the corporate contribution to the community (which is good for business) (Esmond, 2004,10).

Esmond’s research (2001, 28) suggested that corporate volunteering (or as she terms it, employee volunteering) was viewed positively by baby boomers who would be able to volunteer without infringing on their family time or compromising their careers. Participants in Esmond’s research felt that the government should lead the way in modelling corporate volunteering (Esmond, 2001, 28).

The NCV’s Mature Volunteers Enriching Resources in the Community (MAVERIC) project focused on employer-supported volunteering (ESV) in local authorities. While the NCV staff had considerable knowledge of ESV in the private sector, they knew comparatively little about what was happening in local government where 30 per cent of its two million employees were over 50 and many were facing early retirement as a result of restructuring. The NCV’s first task, therefore, was to conduct a survey of all local authorities. The findings have been made available through the NCV’s website.3
The South Australian public service is allowed paid leave to volunteer for and receive training from particular emergency organisations (see Commissioner of Public Employment, 2005). They can also apply for up to 15 days special leave with pay for individual needs and responsibilities. This covers informal care for family members. It could perhaps also cover other types of volunteering. The government needs to lead the way with respect to this type of employee-sponsored volunteering.

**Indigenous Community Volunteers Through Secondment**

**APS Secondees Indigenous Mentoring Program**

ICV has agreed to facilitate a national mentoring program placing senior Australian Public Servants (APS) staff in Council of Australian Government (COAG) trial sites for twelve months, commencing as soon as practicable. The program is a response to suggestions from Indigenous and government leaders that improved governance and project management skills would result from the APS secondee placements. ICV will host and manage the program that will see senior public servants placed into skill transfer projects designed by Indigenous communities from the COAG trial sites. The APS secondees, once selected, will be invited by the community or organisation to work as mentors on projects. These will be designed to enhance community governance skills and/or improve community capacity to develop stronger working relationships with government and the private sector. The duration of the projects will be flexible, based on need.

*(Excerpt from Volunteering Secretariat, 2005, 24 & 25)*

**Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology**

Will commence a Mature Age Mentoring Program in July. Mature age volunteers will be recruited and trained as mentors who will work on various projects which assist people of all ages to improve their career prospects and employability, as well as to address the management and staff development needs of not-for-profit, incorporated community organisations.

*(Excerpt from Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group)*

A good resource for understanding corporate or employee volunteering is the Western Australian *Employee Volunteering and Corporate Social Responsibility: A Guide to Employee Volunteering* (Volunteering Secretariat, 2005). However, this does not make links between older volunteering and employee volunteering. More needs to be learnt about the ways in which these relate.

---

*16 A telephone conversation with DFEEST on 10 November 2005 indicates that this program has not yet been commenced but is still on the agenda.*
Corporate volunteering could also assist in giving those near retirement some experience in the types of volunteer work they may pursue when exiting or winding back paid employment (Esmond, 2001, 28-29).

Whilst government should be a role model with respect to corporate volunteering, the private sector also needs to promote and encourage volunteering by older people.

Wachovia Bank’s “Time Away from Work for Community Service” program allows employees to use four hours of paid time each month to participate in community service, tutoring, and parental involvement in education.

(Excerpt taken from Points of Light Foundation, 2004, 10)

The review of the English HOOVI projects makes a number of suggestions for the private sector (Rochester and Hutchison, 2002, 57). These have been adapted to the South Australian context here:

- companies should be encouraged to develop a strategy and a code of good practice for older volunteers
- they should seek the active support of national and local intermediary bodies and development agencies in developing this strategy
- they should forge relationships with their local voluntary sectors in order to facilitate the implementation of their strategy
- they should look to organisations like Volunteering SA to enable them to make and sustain links with local voluntary agencies interested in providing opportunities for older people to take part in volunteering.

4.4 Family volunteering

Family/group volunteering is where people volunteer as a family or group. This type of volunteering seems particularly relevant to younger older people such as baby boomers who may still have family commitments. Esmond (2001, 27) notes the lack of time baby boomers have and suggests that family volunteering may be a way for these volunteers to combine family time and volunteer time.

Further, family/group volunteering could be a way to encourage older older people (of grandparent age) to volunteer with family or group support. This links with the research that suggests that one facilitator of volunteering is having family and friends who support volunteering as a worthwhile activity (Warburton and Terry, 2000, 253)

Organisations need to develop volunteering tasks that can be done as a group of older people, or as a group by a wide age range from children, to parents, to grandparents.
The **Donn Family** of Tampa Bay, Florida, has turned an annual volunteer event into family volunteering for all generations. Alan Donn and Dorothy Holle-Donn, along with Alan’s parents Ruth and Ray, are the organizers of the Florida Coastal Cleanup, a yearly event to help rid local shorelines and oceans of trash and debris. The project started in 1993 with 25 friends, family and co-workers as volunteers, and grew to 97 in 2001. Their efforts have transformed a former dumping ground into a pristine area now being developed into a public park.

(Excerpt from Points of Light Foundation, 2004, 10-11)
Chapter 5

5 Recommendations

A recent Western Australian study has found that few volunteer-involving organisations specifically target particular age groups (Esmond 2002, 12) and, relevantly, ‘few organisations had even thought of targeting’ the baby boomer age group (Esmond, 2002, 17). In contrast, the UK and the US have nationally funded programs to specifically recruit senior volunteers. The Productivity Commission projects that the ageing population will change the age distribution of volunteers such that older people will predominate in volunteer work (Productivity Commission, 2005, 93-94 & 382-383). This may result in a scarcity of volunteers for organisations that generally rely on younger volunteers (Productivity Commission, 2005, 93-94 & 382-383). Such organisations may particularly need to promote older volunteering. Though all organisations could benefit from promoting older volunteering.

Volunteer-involving organisations need to:

- Ensure their policies and practices are not discriminatory by:
  - Assessing policies and practices for deep-seated assumptions about older people and their capabilities and interests
  - Abolishing any age limit and deal with individuals according to their unique capabilities
  - Encouraging and valuing older volunteers such as through tailoring volunteer activities according to individual capabilities and so that frail people can undertake them
  - Investing in training older volunteers
  - Offering a wide range of activities for older volunteers, in terms of areas of action and activities undertaken

- Specifically recruit older volunteers by:
  - Emphasising the benefits of volunteering for the older person in any recruitment material and techniques
  - Understanding the motivations and propensities to volunteer of older people
 ➢ Emphasising the social contribution the organisation makes and how the volunteer activity contributes to this

 ➢ Encouraging confidence in older people

 ➢ Challenging stereotypes of who volunteers

 ➢ Ensuring potential older volunteers are aware of any reimbursement policies

■ Direct recruitment campaigns at (Rochester and Hutchison, 2002, 32-42):

 ➢ Places that older people are likely to be, such as doctors surgeries, day centres, sheltered housing and churches

 ➢ People who come into contact with older people such as social workers, aged care workers, health professionals

 ➢ ‘Groups in which potential volunteers would be already involved – including older people’s forums and groups drawn from business and the professions.’ (Rochester and Hutchison, 2002, 32)

Montgomery County Volunteer Center, Rockville, Maryland

The Montgomery County Volunteer Center is working with the Points of Light Foundation to create an alliance of organizations to help 50+ adults serve effectively as high impact volunteers. Through focus groups and interviews, the Volunteer Center is helping local nonprofits design high level volunteer projects that address those organizational or community needs they currently are unable to meet. Then by working with local corporations to recruit veteran employees and retirees, the Volunteer Center aims to address businesses’ community outreach needs while simultaneously securing skilled volunteers who may bring additional resources and personnel with them. Finally, this prototype program, which is largely being implemented by a retired lawyer and current volunteer, will help prepare older adults for volunteer and paid post-retirement work in the nonprofit sector. The program’s construction is well underway and will be launched in 2004.

(Excerpt taken from Points of Light Foundation, 2004, 10)

 ➢ Asking older people to volunteer. Personal contact is imperative. People don’t volunteer without being asked (Rochester and Hutchison, 2002, 33)

■ Offer volunteering experiences that:

 ➢ Meet the needs and capabilities of the individual

 ➢ Are flexible in terms of time required, length of activity, and where it can be undertaken

 ➢ Use new volunteering trends such as family volunteering, corporate volunteering and e’volunteering.
Maintain physical and cognitive activity
Provide information about and encouragement of healthy living
Provide personal support
Provide strong social links to the community.
Provide reimbursement for out-of-pocket expenses
Address travel difficulties through reimbursement, travel assistance, or offering at home volunteering opportunities
Provide real responsibility

The review of England’s Home Office’s Older Volunteers Initiative provides a number of good recommendations for volunteer-involving organisations wishing to involve older volunteers (Rochester and Hutchison, 2002, ix-xi):

Vision and commitment
Organisations that aim to involve older people as volunteers need to:
- Develop and articulate a clear and coherent vision of the rationale for involving older volunteers in the work of the organisation which identifies the expected benefits to the organisation and to the volunteers
- Secure the commitment of the organisation as a whole including the governing body, the senior management team and those at operational level whose work will be affected
- Consult the people outside the organisation whose co-operation and collaboration will be necessary if older people are to be involved in its work.

Planning
Organisations also need to develop concrete plans for a project or programme of activities.
This involves:
- Conducting an assessment of the needs which the proposed activities will address
- Undertaking a feasibility study in order to be clear how the proposed programme or project can address the needs
- Identifying the resources required to support the activities
- Developing the structures and systems needed to support volunteering by older people
- Setting out a realistic timescale for the establishment of the programme or project
- Exploring the ways in which the work can be sustained in the long run.

Implementation
At the operational level organisations should be aware that:

- Effective recruitment of older volunteers depends heavily on personal contact and the use of social networks
- Successful contact with potential volunteers involves listening to what they are interested in doing and letting them know about the full range of possible volunteer roles open to them
- Opportunities for volunteering by older people need to be flexible to take account of other commitments and open-ended to the extent that the volunteer can shape his or her role rather than simply slot into pre-conceived roles
- Selection, induction and training should be appropriate to the role and context of the volunteering activity
- Opportunities for volunteering should be as diverse as possible and not constrained by preconceptions of "appropriate" tasks for older volunteers
- Attention should be given to identifying and overcoming barriers to volunteering by older people
- Older volunteers are a valuable resource; the experience and skills they bring to the organisation should be recognised and valued.

Support older volunteering by (adapted from Rochester and Hutchison, 2002, 39-40):

- Having organisational commitment (Rochester and Hutchison, 2002, 39-40)
  - employing an experienced project staff at adequate pay rate
  - integrating older volunteers programs into the overall work of organisation so that have commitment from above
  - having a clear statement of how volunteer work fits into the overall work of the organisation
- Establishing partnerships with other bodies
  - be clear about aims of project
  - roles of partners

The Dark Horse Venture: Inside Out Project

This project had mixed success in gaining access to potential volunteers in partnership with day centres and sheltered housing. Some day centre and scheme managers used their position as gatekeepers to act as a barrier, but those who could be persuaded of the value of the Inside Out project became invaluable allies. A member of staff in one of
the day centres played a key role as the access point or gatekeeper for the project and was very popular with the users. They felt very strongly that he "always got ideas that people can do and encourages us to do them".

(Excerpt from Rochester and Hutchison, 2002, 40)

- Assessment of need
  - Organisations need to assess if there is a need for their project
  - Ensure the feasibility of successfully achieving the goals of the project

- Having a realistic time scale and size of project
  - Recruiting older people may be an ongoing process whereby recruitment strategies are altered. However, there needs to be resources available to support ongoing older volunteers
  - Older volunteer projects may be for a set time period. These need to have realistic time scales.

**Recruiting Baby Boomers**

The Western Australian research on recruiting baby boomers offers a practical ‘how to’ guide to organisations intending on recruiting baby boomer volunteers (Esmond, 2004). The researchers structure their approach around four main steps: goal-setting; big picture fundamentals; follow the baby boomers; and practical recruiting ideas. These are summarised below, with some notable suggestions highlighted:

- **Setting goals:** The principle behind this step is to ensure that the organisation sets itself achievable recruitment goals within a realistic specified time limit. This can be facilitated by having specific, measurable, realistic goals achievable within a set time frame and with it being clear what action is required to achieve this goal. Esmond (2004) also recommends a self-evaluation process whereby the action plan is monitored and any changes needed fed back into the action plan.

  Some helpful tips for this step included:

  - Ensuring that recruitment methods are not limited to written material. Also include ‘active’ recruitment strategies (Esmond, 2004, 6)
  - Avoiding action plans that rely on other groups or organisations changing such as plans depending on more funding
  - Avoiding placing all responsibility on the manager of volunteers, as they will burn out
The big picture: This step draws out nine main principles to keep in mind when forming a recruitment plan. These are:

- ‘Test for the Best in an Ongoing Process’: that means that a recruitment plan needs to be ongoing – not a one off recruitment drive. It also needs to be evaluated frequently and involve more than one strategy
- ‘Do Your Research’: the organisation needs to be aware of their current volunteer profile, use its current volunteers as a resource as to what works in terms of recruiting, work with and share ideas with other organisations, and share ideas within the organisation
- ‘All for One and One for All’: raise the profile of volunteers with the management committee and ensure organisation-wide support for volunteers (particularly from paid staff)
- ‘Policies and Procedures – Remove the Barriers’: reconsider existing policies and procedures that may deter volunteer recruitment. In particular, reduce paperwork.
- ‘Convert the Unconverted’: implement procedures or strategies so as to ensure all enquiries about volunteering are followed up
- ‘Create Collaboration’: collaborate with other organisations and create joint projects, thereby increasing networking
- ‘Share it Around’: share the recruitment load around so that there is a team of people working towards recruitment
- ‘Trendspotting into the Future’: be aware of new trends in volunteering such as online volunteering, corporate volunteering, family volunteering and short term volunteering and incorporate these into your volunteering opportunities
- ‘Think Big and Have Fun!’: take care of the fundamentals and then take small steps to achieve your goals

Follow the baby boomers: The principle behind this step is that baby boomers are a distinct category of people with particular needs. It is important to understand these needs in order to effectively recruit this group of volunteers. Esmond emphasises five key points in this step:

- ‘Understand the Baby Boomers’: Esmond (2004, 11) suggests that baby boomers are ‘re-examining their lives’ such that they often shift from being oriented towards success to being oriented towards making a contribution. This would suggest that recruitment campaigns should emphasise the social contribution element of volunteering. These ‘baby boomer needs’ were addressed in more detail above in the discussion of Esmond’s Boonnet report
- ‘Sell the Benefits’: Esmond (2004) emphasises that baby boomers come from a consumer society and that there is a lot of competition for baby boomers time and energy. Thus organisations need to ‘sell’ their volunteering experiences by emphasising the benefits and attractions
‘Be Flexible’: be prepared to create volunteer opportunities to fit the skills of the volunteer, rather than attempting to fit the volunteer into predetermined volunteer positions

‘Go Headhunting’: if you need a particular specific skill such as policy writing, public relations etc then go head hunting for somebody who fits that skills-set

‘Watch the Clock’: baby boomers feel pressured for time. Thus, plan short-term volunteer experiences with an end date. Esmond suggests that if the volunteer enjoys the experience, they are more likely to come back for more. This is supported by the literature that suggests that previous volunteers are more likely to continue to volunteer (Mutchler, Burr and Caro, 2003). Also, be flexible with respect to the times the volunteer can ‘fit you in’.

Practical ideas: Esmond offers a number of practical recruitment ideas that can be used by organisations recruiting all volunteers. Some of these are reproduced here:

- Provide an information pack for enquiries about volunteering that creates a good first impression: easy and interesting to read and provides answers to frequently asked questions
- Other written material needs to have a short sharp message about the benefits of volunteering
- Circulate written material in locations where your volunteer target group frequents
- Place volunteer message on everything from bumper stickers, badges, book marks and t-shirts
- Use Volunteering SA Inc and The Office for Volunteers – they can direct volunteers to you
- Use local media –print and radio (with the audience demographic in mind). Perhaps attempt to have an article run about your organisation (rather than paying for advertising). Ensure that information for those wishing to volunteer is included at the end of the article or segment
- Have stalls at local fairs. Keep the demographic of people attending in mind and ensure that volunteers and staff with the best people skills attend the stall. Also have people circulating in the fair with brochures and directing people to the stall
- Create public speaking opportunities with service clubs and corporate organisations. This suggestion of Esmond’s links with the trend towards corporate volunteering. If the organisation can develop a relationship with the corporate organisation they may be able to set up a joint project to serve both their interests: the volunteer-involving organisations interest in increasing volunteering and the corporate organisations interest in facilitating good team work, morale, and increasing the companies profile within the community
- Have your volunteering information on the Internet. Make sure that your volunteer information is clearly locatable on your own web site. Also create links back to this on other sites. Such sites may include SEEK (www.seek.com.au) which has a dedicated section to volunteering, Volunteering SA Inc., and GoVolunteer (www.govolunteer.com). These suggestions of Esmond’s can be extended to
web sites specifically directed at seniors. Perhaps there could be links from the JOBWISE website or from the international RSVP web site.

- Word of mouth is still the most effective recruitment strategy. This is consistent with the ABS survey that found that most people became involved in volunteering through being asked (32%) or knowing someone involved (29%) (2001, 8). Use this to facilitate your recruitment strategies such as by having “bring a friend” day. This suggestion could also be adapted to the specific goal of encouraging older people to volunteer such as by having a “bring a senior” day.

- Network with other organisations to create joint projects and cross-referral of skills and experience. Also maintain links with traditional volunteer resources such as Volunteering SA Inc, Office for Volunteers, resource centres and bodies for older people.
Bibliography


ABS (2001) *Voluntary Work: Australia* Catalogue no. 4441.0

http://www.ageconcern.org.uk/AgeConcern/media/FS31AM025(1).pdf


Commissioner for Public Employment, (July 2005), *Commissioner’s Standards 3.4: Responsive and safe employment conditions, Leave.*


Esmond, J. (Principle Consultant) (May 2002) From ‘BOOMNET’ To ‘BOOMNOT’: *Part Two of a Research Project on Baby Boomers and Volunteering* Conducted by TEAM Consultants, commissioned by the Department for Community Development, Government of Western Australia, Volunteering Secretariat

Government of South Australia (March 2004) ‘prosperity through people: A Population Policy for South Australia’

Government of South Australia (undated), Department of Further Education Employment Science and Technology, ‘south Australia works: learning to work programs to 2010’

Heart beat trends ‘Research into Older People and Volunteering For the 2001 Premier’s Forum on Ageing’ funded by the NSW Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care, September 2001


The Smith Family (2005) *Possible Futures: changes, volunteering and the not-for-profit sector in Australia*, Research and Development


Volunteering Australia (2001) *A National Agenda on Volunteering: Beyond the International Year of Volunteers.*

Volunteering Australia (2002) *Submission to the Core Consultative Group on Age Discrimination.*


**Websites**

Administration on Aging, Aging Internet Information Notes : Volunteers and Older Adults
http://www.aoa.gov/prof/notes/Docs/Volunteers_Older_Adults.pdf

Australian Government Super Choice website,

Centrelink website,
http://www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/ea3b9a1335df87bcca256989008040e/11cd687ae0b8bde6ca256f2500010c0a!OpenDocument


CSV’s (Community Service Volunteering) RSVP web site http://www.csv-rsvp.org.uk/

CSV’s Senior Volunteers web site http://www.csv.org.uk/Volunteer/Senior+Volunteers/

CSV Senior Volunteers Directors Speech web site

Department of Families and Communities website (no.1),

Department of Families and Communities website (no.2)