

Research report: Youth volunteering in Auckland, 2019

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This publication may be cited as: Haigh, D. (2020). Research
report: Youth volunteering in Auckland, 2019, *Whanake: The
Pacific Journal of Community Development*, 6(1), 46–56.

Founded at Unitec Institute of Technology in 2015

AN EPRESS PUBLICATION

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Research report: Youth volunteering in Auckland, 2019

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Preface

This research was sponsored by Volunteering Auckland (VA). It is part of their wider research into volunteering by young people (13 to 18 years). Previous work carried out by VA showed that at the age of 18 years volunteers are able to carry out leadership roles. Youth volunteering is reinforced by links with The Duke of Edinburgh's Hillary Award and the William Pike Challenge. Girls tend to volunteer more readily than boys, who may be caught up with sport, which is promoted by schools. Also noted was the tendency towards micro volunteering that is short-term and one-off. Young people's growing concern for the environment, climate change and human rights resulted in volunteering.

Introduction

New Zealand has a proud history of volunteering. This has been highlighted in a recent survey carried out by the Charities Aid Foundation, an international group that measures charitable giving. This recent survey measures volunteering, philanthropy and helping strangers, to produce a Giving Index Score. Overall, New Zealand came third in the world. In terms of volunteering time and donating money it came fifth. In terms of groups of countries, Oceania (primarily Australia and New Zealand) came first for the overall Giving Index Score (Charities Aid Foundation, 2018).

In 2006, Salomon investigated the importance of the non-profit sector. It

was found that in 2004, the sector contributed \$9.8 billion to the New Zealand GDP. This included \$3.3 billion by way of voluntary work. The 200,000 paid and voluntary staff represented 9.6% of the total New Zealand workforce. In 2004, there were 97,000 non-profit organisations. Stats NZ (2015) showed that by 2013 this had grown to 114,000. The non-profit income had also grown from \$8 billion in 2004 to \$13.2 billion in 2013. Given that 90% of all non-profits are run totally by volunteers, it shows the importance of the skill levels, passion and commitment of the voluntary sector. While Salomon's study did not assess the contribution of young people to these figures, it is likely to be notable.

This active voluntary sector was demonstrated following the Christchurch earthquakes in 2010 and 2011. Through Facebook, Sam Johnson, a 21-year-old student, created the Student Volunteer Army, calling on Canterbury University students to help remove soil liquefaction. The army grew to 2500 volunteers and they made an important difference to the wellbeing of residents following both earthquakes. This Volunteer Army is now a permanent community organisation that deals with environmental cleanups, building walking tracks, riparian planting and removing wilding pines.

The importance of youth volunteering is stated in the Ministry of Youth Development's *Youth Development Strategy Aotearoa*:

Strategy 2 states:

Youth development is about young people being connected. ... This includes their family and whānau, their community, their school, training institution or workplace and their peers. (2004, para. 7)

In addition, the strategy stresses positive youth development. It suggests that we replace the deficit view of adolescence with a strengths-based approach.

McLaren (2002) notes the importance of young people engaging in activities outside school or work. She says:

Participation by young people in out-of-school activities is a significant protective factor Young people who participate in extracurricular activities, whether at school or elsewhere, tend to stay longer at school, show less antisocial behaviour and drug use, drink more responsibly, attend school more often, show better attitudes to sex and have better academic and career success. (p. 10)

Positive youth development sees all young people as having strengths, including the potential to effect change, both personally and within the wider society. The contemporary social movement led by young people has highlighted this development, and is demanding policy changes to combat climate change. The vision of school children taking the initiative was triggered by a sit-in by then 15-year-old Greta Thunberg outside the Swedish Parliament in 2018. Thunberg's message has been supported by academics and recently at worldwide demonstrations involving millions of young people and their parents. It is likely that this movement will encourage more young volunteers in environmental and human-rights causes.

An international study by Butt et al. (2017) reveals useful ways of considering volunteer motivations. This study recognises the challenges

of organisations in retaining volunteers, and provides an understanding of motivational factors. To explain this, the authors suggest the ABCE model:

- A = Affiliation
- B = Beliefs
- C = Career development
- E = Egoistic

Affiliation relates to the fact that people volunteer due to family members, friends and peers also volunteering and they have a desire to socialise with them. In a study examining age differences in volunteering motives, it was discovered that younger volunteers were motivated by a desire to network with others, while older volunteers were motivated by a sense of care and concern for society.

Beliefs and personal values are key motivational factors. Volunteering in religious organisations is part of this as well, through key values such as altruism and a desire to help others.

Career development is especially important for young people, and can be a well-focused motive for volunteering. It is through volunteering that young people can learn new skills and also demonstrate their commitment to an organisation and a cause.

Egoism relates to the fact that some people appreciate gaining praise and being generally acknowledged for their voluntary work.

Research project

This section of the report analyses eight interviews with people within Auckland community organisations who have responsibility for volunteers, and specifically for young volunteer engagement. The organisations are involved in environmental enhancement, social services or human rights. For the purpose of this research, young volunteers are from the ages of 13 to 18 years. The interviewees signed a consent form to be interviewed. All eight were enthusiastic about the contribution made by young volunteers as well as the personal benefits to young people derived from their volunteering. Their names and organisations are listed in the Appendix. From the interviews, six themes emerged:

A. VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES

The following table shows how varied the activities are, but it also indicates the extent of work that young people can do.

<i>Organisation</i>	<i>Activities</i>
Blind & Low Vision NZ (previously the Blind Foundation)	<p>One-to-one support of blind people: visiting, reading and going to a café. This improves the social life of blind people.</p> <p>Group voluntary work: social groups, book clubs and craft clubs, e.g., knitting. This recreational work supports the professional work of the organisation, e.g., walking, use of the cane and guide dogs.</p> <p>Helping people return to their previous recreational interests or assisting with new recreations.</p> <p>Administrative volunteers helping with computer work.</p> <p>Fundraising work, e.g., collecting boxes with cash donations and street appeals.</p> <p>Other services such as talking books, puppy raising (for future guide dogs) and kennel cleaning.</p> <p>Young people are or have been involved in all of these activities alongside adult volunteers.</p>
Kelmarna Gardens	<p>Young volunteers do all kinds of gardening, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Seedling pricking - Weeding - Compost turning - Harvesting - Packing food for the market
Royal Forest & Bird Society	<p>Winter: native tree planting (this year volunteers planted 3000 trees). Other seasons: removing noxious weeds and clearing away grass from young trees.</p>
Hub Zero (Tongan sustainability programme)	<p>Waste minimisation, e.g., sewing donated fabric into clothes, cushions, etc.</p> <p>Training young people in sewing skills.</p> <p>Community gardening (planting and harvesting).</p> <p>Collecting leftover fruit and vegetables from the Avondale market and redistributing to families.</p>
Sports Waitākere	<p>Involved in team-building sports.</p> <p>Participating in 'kids on cycles' programme.</p> <p>Sports coaching of younger children.</p> <p>Helping at holiday programmes.</p>
Kaipātiki Project (a sustainability project centred on a garden and restoration project on the North Shore)	<p>Planting native trees and plants, and general restoration work.</p> <p>Pest control (animals and plants).</p> <p>Water-quality monitoring of nearby streams.</p> <p>General gardening.</p>
Amnesty International	<p>Many activities operate within schools (70 high schools throughout NZ) that encourage volunteering at Amnesty.</p> <p>These activities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Providing leadership within a school for younger students. - Organising events or petitions. - Speaking at various engagements, usually within schools. - Writing letters to officials. - Visiting MPs and having 'respectful conversations' with them. - Generally co-ordinating group activities.

Interviewees also made various comments about the importance of youth volunteering. At various times respondents noted that young volunteers often gained in self-confidence, commitment, skills they might use in the workforce and genuine sociability. These comments included the following:

“Providing it is legal [in terms of their age], young people can do anything older volunteers can do.”

“Organisations that underestimate the contribution of young people do so at their peril.”

“The lovely thing about young people is they grow older and wiser.”

“Once you have learned activism then this continues for the rest of your life.”

B. MOTIVATIONS

This section analyses the motivations and attractions of volunteering for young people. Responses included a number of motivations with which they were familiar.

<i>Motivations</i>	<i>Number mentioned</i>
CV. Adding volunteer experience to their CV (however, two mentioned that this became a motivation only when mentioned to volunteers by the respondent).	6
Awards. Engaging in the Duke of Edinburgh’s Hillary Award and William Pike Challenge (for some this was encouraged by their school).	4
Social life. Mixing with others, e.g., peers. Some organisations preferred volunteers not to use their cellphone on the job, and to engage with others. One respondent said that “they are delightful chatterboxes.”	4
Personal values and development. The values mentioned were empowerment (e.g., that they can take action on a political issue), sustainability and that they are open to new challenges.	4
Contribution to making a better planet/world. These included expressions like “make a difference,” and “do good.”	3
Learning skills for future employment, e.g., gardening and working with experts.	2
Enjoyment of outdoor work.	1
Natural progression. Engagement with clients because the individual already knows a blind person.	1
Migrants. People new to NZ can learn social and language skills.	1

When these motivations are compared to those mentioned in the Wardlaw report (2014) there are a number of similarities. For example, progress towards the Duke of Edinburgh’s Hillary Award was mentioned, along with the social

component of volunteering. Volunteers as visitors to the Elizabeth Knox Home and Hospital commented in the Wardlaw report that they enjoyed building new relationships and doing something meaningful. Some volunteers were also considering nursing as a future profession.

C. WAYS OF ATTRACTING YOUNG VOLUNTEERS

<i>Ways</i>	<i>Number mentioned</i>
Short-term projects. Most interviewees mentioned that young volunteers prefer volunteering for set events (e.g., tree planting, fundraising) rather than making long-term commitments.	7
Volunteering with their peers. Young volunteers work best in small groups. They enjoy being with their friends. One said that they would only come with their peers and not on their own because they were too shy. One respondent said that they put young people together (the buddy system) during their voluntary work.	4
Food and fun. Four mentioned that food and fun were essential for attracting young volunteers. Music should be of their own choice, another said the music had to be loud, and another provided a DJ for an event, along with barbecue food.	4
Personal commitments. Three mentioned individual personal commitments for the long term. For example, one was committed to trapping animal pests, another had established a long-term friendship with an elderly client and a third was a regular volunteer at a garden along with his dad. Also mentioned was that volunteers gained social connections and learned useful skills.	3
Leadership skills. One mentioned that students are attracted to learning and using their leadership skills within the school. Another mentioned that 18-year-olds became excellent sports coaches for younger students.	2

D. CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS

<i>Challenges</i>	<i>Number mentioned</i>
Transport availability. Some sites are distant from public transport, e.g., Kaipātiki and Kelmarna Gardens. The one major exception is Blind & Low Vision NZ, which is situated on major bus routes and not far from a railway station. The cost of transport was also mentioned.	4
Time available. Young people also have school, family, sport and church responsibilities. They are only available after school times. A Tongan group also has obligations of singing and dance practice.	4
Using accessible language , e.g., non-scientific.	2
Dealing with stressful human-rights issues and stories.	1
Politics. Some parents do not understand or like the politics of Amnesty International.	1

E. GENDER AND DIVERSITY

<i>Gender and diversity</i>	<i>Number mentioned</i>
<p>Girls predominate. Practically all organisations said that girl volunteers outnumber boys. For example, in two organisations girl volunteers represent 80% of all youth volunteers. In another, girls represent 60% of youth volunteers. In the organisation that promotes sport, there are equal numbers of girls and boys. The predominance of girls to boys is also affected by the fact that two girls' colleges supply most volunteers to two organisations (Carmel College to Kaipātiki, and St Mary's College to Kelmarna).</p> <p>A number of respondents suggested that boys enjoy sport and therefore have less time for volunteering. Others said that girls mature earlier than boys and see the benefits of volunteering. However, one said that when boys volunteer they contribute hugely.</p> <p>One said, "Girls give to others and boys give to themselves."</p>	7
<p>Young people coming from schools are a mix of the ethnic make-up of the school. In West Auckland they tend to be ethnically mixed.</p> <p>In terms of age, many respondents said that all ages were welcome and they could do all aspects of voluntary work.</p>	

F. OTHER ISSUES

Age difference between 13 and 18 years was not seen as an issue.

Two organisations noted that the older volunteers developed into sports coaches and school leaders. Otherwise, age was no barrier to volunteering in organisations with a history of engaging with youth. This contrasts with the Wardlaw report, which shows only one out of nine organisations surveyed engaged 13-year-old volunteers. The other eight only accepted volunteers aged 18 or older, due to legal requirements and the need for mature volunteers.

Climate-change awareness. The organisations dealing with environmental and sustainability issues had noticed a recent growing interest in youth volunteering. They expected the number of young volunteers to increase as the commitment to the social movement for climate-change demands progresses.

Social media. Young people and smartphones seem inseparable. However, for safety reasons, some organisations asked volunteers not to use them on the job, rather they should concentrate on their task. Two noted this had positive effects such as building personal, one-to-one relations with peers, older people and international volunteers. However, there was an understanding that cellphones were an ideal way of making contact with potential volunteers.

Conclusions

The range of voluntary activities is extensive. This indicates that young people in the age group of 13 to 18 years have the skills and dedication to apply themselves to a wide range of tasks. Naturally, the volunteers aged 18 years tended to have the confidence to take on higher-level roles such as leadership. The Wardlaw report demonstrates that 18 years is an age when volunteers can take on functions requiring maturity, e.g., personal refugee services. While it is accepted that some volunteers need a level of maturity, there are still many tasks that younger people might do, such as supporting experienced volunteers and paid staff. In relation to the age of volunteers, these points add weight to the concept that we should take a 'strengths-based' approach to youth development that includes all aspects of volunteering.

The many types of volunteer motivations that this study explored are significant. Butt et. al. reduce motivations to four: affiliation, beliefs, career and egoism. These four did not fit well with the motivations explored in this study. For example, some volunteers only considered the usefulness of adding their voluntary experience to their CVs when co-ordinators mentioned it. The special interest in the Duke of Edinburgh's Hillary Award and the William Pike Challenge was an important reason for volunteering and this did not fit well with Butt et al.'s categories.

It was noteworthy that most organisations had more girl volunteers than boys. Some mentioned that there was an 80/20 ratio of girls to boys. It was suggested that girls mature earlier than boys and that boys are interested in engaging in sport, which is pushed at school. This left them little time for voluntary efforts. However, not all boys are involved in sport and they could make a valuable contribution through voluntary work. In order to attract boys, some agencies established specific events of only two hours' duration as well as providing food and music, in order to attract boys. Another way of seeking young male volunteers is just to ask them. The Tongan respondent said, "Girls just come and boys have to be asked." The modern form of 'micro' volunteering that involves short-term, or even one-off, projects and enjoyable volunteering is likely to be a way forward for attracting young people, especially boys.

In addition, with young people's growing concern for the environment and climate change it is likely that those organisations that deal with sustainability, environmental enhancement and human rights are likely to attract more young volunteers. All organisations need to explore their environmental policies, including their carbon footprint, and make necessary adjustments.

Finally, when I asked about the importance of training and education of young people in relation to volunteering, one respondent said, "Education must lead to action to help the community develop through skills and knowledge."

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David Haigh has a long career in community development. He is the former head of CD for the Auckland Regional Authority and has recently retired from Unitec New Zealand, where he taught in social practice, sociology and not-for-profit management. David is active in Auckland Action Against Poverty.

Appendix

<i>Interviewees</i>		
Kaipātiki Project	An environmental organisation focusing on gardening and native plant restoration work.	Sam Tu'itahi
Amnesty International NZ (Auckland)	A human-rights organisation with a local focus on refugees and climate change.	Margaret Taylor
Royal Forest & Bird Protection Society	A national environmental organisation involved in native-tree planting on Waiheke Island.	Lincoln Jackson
Kelmarna Gardens	A community garden, founded in 1981. It has now taken on a role of gardening education and training.	Adrian Roach and Judy Keats
Sports Waitākere	An organisation that promotes sports, trains coaches and runs holiday programmes in West Auckland.	Pauline Butt
Blind & Low Vision NZ (Auckland)	A social-service agency assisting the blind and people with low vision.	Sue Vyas
Hub Zero	A Tongan organisation involved in aspects of waste minimisation, community gardening and food distribution to Tongan families.	Maile Uluave