Barriers to volunteering by newcomers in Wheatbelt towns in Western Australia

BETTER CONNECTIONS
Wheatbelt Volunteering

Dr Megan Paull

FOREWORD

People by their nature are inquisitive and creative. This, in part, finds expression in determining what works and then working to improve 'what works' in all human endeavours. These are the cornerstones of the research venture which this report so ably demonstrates. The report seeks to find out firstly what is hindering the volunteering effort in the Wheatbelt with a clear view to assisting the local communities to address these issues. The research report is also part of a larger project which suggests by its title that solutions to these issues and barriers exist and there is the commitment to take the steps necessary to achieve the 'Better Connections' which support community life.

Through this research and in concert with the Wheatbelt Development Commission, Volunteering WA took the opportunity of finding out what would assist people to feel more connected to their community, to put down roots, to find and keep employment and in turn to contribute to the wider community. The report specifically seeks to find out what prevents greater or continued volunteering with the aim of assisting communities and the organisations in them to devise strategies which will encourage volunteering, include newcomers, provide flexible options, and support organisations in their volunteering recruitment.

Community people, organisational staff and managers, and Shire representatives all have extensive knowledge of their place and environments, and familiarity and understanding of the issues which have been highlighted in this report, and this 'practice wisdom' is a first and necessary part of the process to working towards improving community life. Formal research, of the kind performed for this report, is an essential next stage. The rigorous and systematic examination of the concerns and circumstances found in rural settings performed by the researchers validate and support these understandings as well as contribute new ways of confronting the issues which had possibly not been considered before now. The value of undertaking formal research to explore issues, describe what is found and provide reasoned explanations is exemplified in this report. The findings may justify previously held views and support suggestions for change and strategies, or they may stimulate searches for new solutions.

Additionally this research expands the formal knowledge available about volunteering in the rural sector. Local Wheatbelt and other communities, VWA, other Third Sector researchers, government planners and many other groups can be the beneficiaries of this effort. It fulfils the desire to know and to improve.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This summary outlines key themes identified in the part of the project funded by a starter grant from the Faculty of Business and Law at Edith Cowan University to examine the barriers to newcomers taking up volunteering in wheatbelt towns. The research was conducted using questionnaires and focus groups in four Wheatbelt locations chosen because of their different demographic profiles.

Key needs which emerged in this section of the report can be identified as:

- Clear information is required to enable potential volunteers to assess the nature, types and time commitments required by community organisations.

  Examples include:
  More detailed advertisements, newspaper articles or recruitment packs which indicate exactly what the volunteer might be committing themselves to when volunteering.

- Flexibility in the approach of community organisations is needed to make it possible for a wider range of people to volunteer.

  Examples include:
  – changed meeting arrangements,
  – pooled child minding,
  – shared jobs/roles

- There is a need to break down perceptions of an "inner circle" or "closed shop" in some organisations/towns/regions to encourage newcomers to volunteer and to continue to volunteer.

  Examples include:
  Organisations to consider and trial changes to the way they operate or communicate with new or potential new volunteers

It is also apparent that community organisations may need some guidance or assistance in co-ordinating or implementing strategies which might address these. Some level of assistance is available from the local councils in each location, and from Volunteering WA.   It is apparent, however, that in the absence of a local Volunteer Resource Centre, personnel and resources which are local to the region, and focussed on volunteering and community organisations will provide a more strategic approach to the support to be provided.

- Community organisations need guidance or assistance in co-ordinating or implementing strategies which might address these.

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BACKGROUND

Many organisations involving volunteers in regional towns have reported experiencing difficulties in maintaining their numbers of volunteers due, in part, to the changing demographics being experienced in regional areas across Australia. In Western Australia there is evidence that the volunteer rate for non-metropolitan areas has declined approximately 7% between 2000 and 2006 (FHCSIA, 2009). Populations across the non-metropolitan regions have not all declined, with areas such as the Pilbara and other mining regions experiencing a significant boom in recent times. Other areas, including those with agriculture as the focus, have experienced declining numbers, especially of young people. These changing demographics can have a significant effect on the ability of the community organisations to provide services, maintain the welfare, recreational and leisure activities in the region, and sustain the community development activities which assist in keeping towns operating.

In the Wheatbelt region of Western Australia there are variations in population which vary from town to town, with some places experiencing an influx of newcomers and others reporting noticeable declines. As has been discussed in the companion report (see Volunteering WA, 2009), the twin results of these population changes are the pressures on community organisations to sustain volunteering in order to provide local services. Emergency services such as the Bushfire Brigades and the St John Ambulance Service rely on increasingly diminishing numbers of volunteers, while at the same time having to cope with increasing levels of regulation and control. Services to the sick and elderly experience greater demands as the population ages, but they too are increasingly unable to meet those demands. Sporting and leisure organisations find it difficult to field and support teams or provide committees to run the organisations, and community events such as annual field days rely on the same group of volunteers to run the events every year.

Anecdotally, newcomers to town are said to be less and less willing to involve themselves in volunteer work and community organisations. It is the view of those involved in community development in the Wheatbelt region that in order to ensure the growth of strong, healthy communities, newly arrived residents in these towns can and need to be enticed into volunteering, and encouraged to stay, thus enhancing the community's capacity to deliver volunteer emergency services and other desired community activities.

This component of the *Better Connections* research project has been to identify barriers which prevent newcomers from volunteering or from continuing to volunteer.

Previous Research

Despite anecdotal information from the regions that community organisations are finding it increasingly difficult to attract and retain volunteer numbers, statistical evidence indicates that "Being a resident of a capital city lessens the likelihood of volunteering on a yearly or daily basis and also reduces the time donated to volunteering" (Blttman & Fisher, 2006, p. 37). Most recent data on volunteering suggests that overall the volunteering rate in Western Australia has continued to increase (FHCSIA, 2008). Current evidence available from the ABS data at this stage indicates that while 37% of West Australians volunteer, it is likely that fewer people are giving more hours in rural areas, and that the volunteer rate in the regions has fallen (FHCSIA, 2008). At the time of writing this report, no specific data was available at a regional level. So whilst there is evidence that non-metropolitan volunteering is said to have fallen by about 7%, the volunteer rate for the Wheatbelt region as compared to mining regions, for example, is unknown.

It is now widely accepted that the involvement of local people in their communities bolsters community spirit and encourages local solutions be sought for local problems (2003). Community involvement can and should be nurtured through the development of community-based groups. There is considerable research on what motivates individuals to volunteer, with evidence continuing to demonstrate that people volunteer, and continue to volunteer, for a wide range of reasons, including altruistic, egoist and normative motives. More recently the focus has turned to those who do not volunteer, with barriers to

those who might otherwise volunteer being a key focus of this more recent work. Researchers in the US have investigated the role of social anxiety as a barrier to volunteering, reporting on the widely accepted notion that being personally asked, "word of mouth", is a powerful recruitment tool for volunteer involving organisations, and investigating why initial contact between the potential volunteer and the organisation may be insufficient to initiate or maintain volunteer activity. Handy and Cnaan (2007) report that although a personal message may have brought a new volunteer into an organisation, lack of follow-up can lead to the individual dropping out after one or two visits. They cite the example of the Sydney Olympic Games where the Olympic Committee recruited some 75,655 volunteers only to find that twenty thousand of them withdrew after the first day of reporting. Their research has found that one of the elements which may lead to this reluctance to volunteer may be associated with social anxiety of varying degrees, "and transformation of a new recruit into a committed long-term volunteer takes many stages and requires a complex strategy on the part of volunteer coordinators." (p. 53).

In Western Australia in particular, there is a small amount of research on barriers to volunteering studies conducted in relation to the jobless (Cockram, 2002) and as part of a larger project relating to disabilities (Rowley, 1996). In addition there has been work done on the Baby Boomer generation to investigate reasons for volunteering (TEAM Consultants, 2001), and more broadly on motivation to volunteer (Esmond & Dunlop, 2004). No focussed research on barriers to volunteering in rural WA has been located.

Research conducted by a team out of the University of South Australia which examined perceptions of volunteering among indigenous communities and people from non-English speaking backgrounds, identified issues associated with the perceptions of and barriers to volunteering by people from such diverse backgrounds. Their findings included differing understandings as to what constitutes volunteering, and the approaches to recruitment and retention of volunteers which tended to follow patterns of consistently recruiting from the same pools of populations (Kerr, Savelsberg, Sparrow & Tedmanson, 2001).

At a national level The Regional Women's Advisory Council (RWAC) (2001) identified that the most serious barrier to volunteering was people feeling negative about their community. Economic rationalism was found to contribute to such negativity. The study found evidence that communities want to overcome these barriers and that efforts to do so can be successful. Discrete problems, such as the level of drug and alcohol use, have led to some negative feelings about certain communities, however, they have also been the catalyst for older volunteers to initiate community action. Broad regional, state, national and international policies or philosophies, such as economic rationalism, present greater difficulties for individual communities, with views about the economy taking insufficient notice of the benefits associated with social capital. Despite this, some had made successful efforts to compensate for local losses incurred. Some communities need opportunities to get started on the process of feeling better about themselves and developing success stories (RWAC, 2001).

The second most serious barrier identified by the RWAC was the reluctance of some groups of people to get involved (Regional Women's Advisory Council, 2001) There was strong evidence that when young people see a reluctance to volunteer in others, they are less likely to volunteer themselves. Peer group pressure can be very powerful, and the lead of others in the community can be a stimulus to action. The women who participated in this study put "giving youth and children opportunities to be involved" high on their list of important factors, and considered it to be critical. Young people can work together in responsible groups, creating and implementing their own solutions to the dilemmas they face and in the process gain a sense of purpose. Such dilemmas include inadequate educational and employment opportunities and a lack of recognition of their achievements. Issues associated with youth involvement are not confined to volunteer activity but work in volunteer involving organisations can be one place where the next generation of leaders can gain experience. In Western Australia there is evidence that projects have been undertaken across a wide range of communities at different times, some of which are documented (e.g. Dodson, Johnstone, & Dodson, 1999) and on the evidence presented by the RWAC it is likely that communication of these activities will help to increase youth creativity in developing their own projects.

Another area of research into the barriers to volunteering in rural areas is in the field of emergency services. In rural and urban fringe areas of Australia bushfires are a major seasonal threat to life and property. For generations, communities have responded to this threat by establishing volunteer fire brigades. Volunteer numbers in emergency services have been said to be declining over the past two decades. As part of an effort to understand this decline the NSW Bushfire Service surveyed communities in central and western NSW (Birch & McLennan, 2006). Time was the most commonly reported barrier to volunteering for the NSW Bushfire Service in the "Grain belt" towns participating in this research.

Other findings included that 45% of respondents thought that work, business, farming or family commitments were barriers to their joining up. 41% felt that they could not leave their work, business or farm, and 26% believed that their employer would not approve. Interestingly 42% indicated that should there be a big enough fire they would leave their commitments to fight the fire anyway and so joining the service was not necessary.

Alarm is expressed by trained firefighters when they hear this view. They believe that the untrained firefighting volunteers who join up spontaneously actually add to the workload of the trained firefighter due to their lack of understanding of the safety precautions and equipment use in particular. Some interesting research has been done on spontaneous volunteering in the wake of disasters such as the Boxing Day Tsunami and Hurricane Katrina, as well as the Canberra bushfires (e.g. Greenwood, n.d.; Porter, 2004). The concept of "trained" vs "untrained" volunteer has emerged from this research.

In the NSW study, about 40% of respondents felt that they could not put their own family, friends and neighbours first if they were off elsewhere on RFS duties, and 23% indicated that there was no child care available. 40% expressed concern for their own safety with 36% being concerned about loss of income if they were to be injured (Birch & McLennan, 2006).

Questions on a broader range of barriers brought some interesting results. 38% felt they would rather donate money to the RFS than join, while on the other hand 27% indicated financial constraints prevented them from joining, and 18% were concerned about the personal expenses including petrol. 32% were concerned about the legal liability associated with firefighting.

Health and wellbeing was a further concern with 37% indicating that they felt they were too old, sick, unfit or disabled to joint the RFS. These figures were hazy as people were somewhat unclear about how much of a barrier this might be.

Finally, 33% were just not interested and 18% felt there was no need for a local fire service - a figure the authors considered surprising for a rural Australian setting. This research forms part of a much larger programme of research being carried out by the Bushfire Co-operative Research Centre (Birch & McLennan, 2006).

Ageing is another area where barriers to research have been investigated. Recent Australian research by Warburton, Paynter and Petriwskyj (2007) has demonstrated that involvement in productive activities, particularly volunteering, has important social and individual benefits in the contemporary ageing environment. Warburton, Paynter and Petriwskyj's research is a two phase case study that explores the incentives and barriers to volunteering by those aged 50 and older. Potential barriers include a negative perception of volunteer work, fear of encountering ageism, and concerns about the increasing regulatory organisational environment. Research by Paull (2008) has found that managers and volunteers alike can make assumptions about what older people can and cannot do which influence their interactions with volunteer involving organisations. Such invisible barriers are not only put up by the organisations but by the volunteers and their peers.

Grey nomads is a term being used to describe a large number of older Australians who travel the country towing caravans and stop in various regional locations. Researchers from the University of Technology Sydney and the University of Western Sydney travelled to Kimba and Roxby Downs in South Australia in order to investigate potential new volunteer programs that are attractive to grey nomads (Lord, 2006). Both the UTS/UWS study and a local study in Western Australia have been investigating how

to "capture" these newcomers as visiting volunteers (VWA, 2006). The Visiting Volunteers programme operating in Western Australia has mechanisms in place for "grey nomads" to volunteer their services to rural towns for a period associated with their travel.

Research into rural and regional volunteering in other parts of the world will necessarily be based on different community profiles to those found in rural and regional Australia. Despite this there is some work which has been done which offers insights which may be useful for Australian volunteer involving organisations to consider. The Scottish Government's Household Survey (2008) investigated the question "why did you stop being involved in voluntary work or activities?" by regional area. It is recognised that the classifications will be considerably different in terms of the regional profiles for similar classifications in Western Australia. It is interesting however, that lack of time was the most commonly cited reason for respondents having given up volunteering in a number of Scottish regions: small accessible towns (24.3%); small remote towns (16.7%); accessible rural (21.6%); remote rural (26.8%). The survey did indicate that problems with public transport were more likely to act as a barrier to volunteering in rural areas than in urban areas. It was also discovered that many non-volunteers had a lack of awareness of what volunteering involves which contributed to the perception that they did not have the time to volunteer. One non-volunteer believed that *volunteering is intense and emotionally draining* (Scottish Government's Household Survey 2008).

In the US rural residents reported two main impediments to getting more involved in voluntary work. These were lack of time, and lack of information about voluntary work (Points of Light Foundation, 2008). Volunteers, potential volunteers, and volunteer coordinators also cited lack of day-care, transportation, family commitments and lack of leadership as barriers. Less tangible barriers include many residents not knowing what talents or skills they have that could be useful, negative perceptions about volunteering, and fear of being ridiculed by others if they got involved in volunteering. Churches and schools were the most common type of organisations through which US rural residents got involved in their communities (Points of Light Foundation, 2008). Kemmelmeter, Jambor and Letner (2006) found, when focussing on regional variations within the United States, that individualism was positively related to charitable giving and volunteerism, such that both were more likely to occur in states identified as having an individualist culture.

Points of Light Foundation (2008) reported some localised research from rural areas including a wheat producing region in south central Kansas. Evidence from these localised studies was that there were some aspects of rural volunteering which were similar to the experiences of urban volunteering such as the need for trust in community leadership and in gatekeepers, as well as the need for tailoring recruitment approaches to suit local needs. Without local leaders who were willing to take the time to get involved and move forward on the service project for which it was undertaking research, it was impossible to implement and continue its initiative. In addition local leaders are needed to help introduce an outside group to residents in order to develop trust. (Points of Light Foundation, 2008). Similarly in Humboldt County, it is crucial to identify and acknowledge the important role of gatekeepers, the individuals who can promote insight into local culture and ease acceptance in the community for new organisations trying to make their way into a community. Similar to the Australian scene, in these two locations it is important to note that these two studies identified the importance of informal volunteering or "neighbouring" as volunteer activity, particularly in the remote and rural areas where services are few or nonexistent.

This brief survey of the literature is by no means exhaustive, but does demonstrate some key themes which are important to the conduct of this research. Of these the "time" factor is a constant theme, as is the concept of better information for potential volunteers. These two themes are not confined to people in rural areas and there is evidence to suggest that with increasingly busy lives, people expect to be able to use their time wisely when they volunteer, and to be able to know in advance what their time commitments will be if they choose to volunteer. This ties in with better information about the volunteering opportunities which are available to potential volunteers, who want to know what they will be doing, before they make a commitment.

It seems also, particularly with the evidence from the NSW bushfires research, that the information which potential volunteers need, may include information about how important the volunteers are to the local community and the importance of preparedness and training. Finally, the localised research undertaken in the US highlights the need for trust in the leadership of volunteer groups and their gatekeepers, an issue which will be returned to in the discussion section of this paper.

METHODOLOGY

This study, funded by a starter grant from the Faculty of Business and Law at ECU, aimed to identify some of the barriers to newcomers volunteering in their own or neighbouring towns in the wheatbelt region of Western Australia. Specific questions explored were:

- Who are newcomers to wheatbelt region towns and neighbourhoods?
- What encourages newcomers to become involved in volunteer activity in their new town or its neighbouring areas?
- What prevents newcomers from volunteering in their new town or neighbourhood?
- What sort of action might minimise the barriers identified?
- What are some of the strategies organisations might adopt which will help newcomers overcome those barriers to volunteering?

The study was conducted in four locations identified as having different demographic profiles. Locations for the study were determined based on advice from the steering committee for the larger project funded in part by the Wheatbelt Development Commission. Anecdotal evidence and Australian Bureau of Staistics data provided by the Commission indicated a different regional profile for each of a number of regions across the wheatbelt. Selection of the four locations was based on an attempt to obtain a representative cross section based on the regional profiles.

Town A

Town A is located a little over 85 km east of Perth. The total population is officially at a figure just over 4000 but swells at weekends with a number of property owners who also reside in the metropolitan area. Of those living in the shire, 2006 ABS figures show that one in three had lived in a different local government area five years previously (60 % had relocated from Perth). Improvements in infrastructure, including transport routes, had resulted in easier access to Perth and as such the wider region has gained a reputation as a 'tree change' destination. The median age of the shire residents stands at just over 40 years of age, above the state average of 36 years. In 2006 34% of households in the region, inclusive of the neighbouring shires were couples only households, an increase of 16% from 2001. The region has seen a surge in land and house sales since 2003 as the area offered an affordable lifestyle opportunity in relative close proximity to Perth. One phenomenon that has occurred due to this lifestyle opportunity is the influx to the region of fly in fly out mining workers establishing their homes in the area. The most common industry of employment in this shire is metal ore mining. Shire data indicates that the region is known for its historical, cultural and tourist attractions, as well as the modern amenities including sporting and civic amenities.   Just outside the town is a light industrial area which includes various light industries, as well as an area earmarked for future development.

As with any location in the wheatbelt region a significant proportion of the land area in the shire has an agricultural focus, with sheep, cattle and grain, with the local wheat bin and the rail line being prominent features. Commuter trains run to Perth on a daily basis, and there is an airstrip.

In the town which houses the council offices, there is a high school, court, library, museum, visitor centre and telecentre, all of which are volunteer involving organisations. There is a hospital in a neighbouring shire. Other services involving volunteers include ambulance, fire service, sporting clubs, scouts, gardening clubs, school based organisations and the schools themselves.

Town B

Town B is located approximately 250 km east of Perth, on the main road and rail route. The shire has a total population of approximately 3500. A major commercial and retail centre of the eastern wheatbelt, it is a regional base for a range of government agencies and services. It promotes itself as having an economy based on agriculture, of which sheep and grain farming is the main industry of the area. According to the ABS, sheep and grain farming does not rank in the top five most common industries of employment, reflective perhaps of the declining numbers of people staying on the land and the reduced labour available for this industry. Other main industries in the area include manufacturing. Particular activities associated with the town would identify it too specifically but bring a range of people associated with particular industries for short term stays, as well as employees who come in for specialist industry employment. There is an airfield and train station which brings passenger as well as wheat trains to the town. There is of course a wheat bin as well. On our visit to the town we noted newer council premises, limited tourist accommodation, a sport and recreation centre, retail outlets associated with agriculture and farming, as well as furniture, and facilities such as a library and telecentre. Nearby towns through which we travelled on the way there offered little in the way of these services and included a number of premises where businesses had moved away or closed down. This town, however, showed limited evidence of this decline to the visitor.

Town C

Town C is located 350 km south east of Perth with a population of approximately 700 people, with the shire population extending to 1500 people. The most common industry of employment here is sheep and grain farming at 15.7% of the total population. Crops are similar to those in other wheatbelt areas, wheat, canola, oats, barley, lupins and other legumes. Another significant industry of the area is mining, and tourism adds a further dimension to the economy. A hospital, high school, library, and sporting facilities are situated in the town along with a telecentre, the council offices, library and visitor centre. Significant local events which draw visitors on a regular basis would identify the town and region, but are largely the result of annual volunteer effort. The wheat bin and associated grain handling, and the mining operations are the main uses for the rail line here. Visitors can access the town by bus. Newcomers to the town include retirees, people relocating for work, and staff at the hospital, including staff for the nurses' quarters.

Town D

Town D is located approximately 250 km north east of Perth, and is the base for the shire offices for a shire which incorporates a number of towns and a total population of approximately 1400. The most common industry of employment is sheep and grain farming at 10.7%. Other significant industries include manufacturing and machinery and equipment wholesaling, largely associated with the agricultural and mining industries. Situated on the rail line, the wheat bin is once again a prominent feature. With the road to the north east passing through the town there is also a reasonable tourist trade. A district high school and hospital, offices of a number of government departments, and amenities such as a sporting complex, library, telecentre and visitors centre operate in this town.

Data collection

In each of the locations a twofold approach was used.

Newcomers were invited to a focus group meeting in each town through an advertisement in a local newsletter or newspaper. In some towns there were two meetings, one in the evening and one during the day but as the data collection went on it became apparent that an early evening meeting was all that was required.

At the commencement of the meetings participants were asked to complete a questionnaire seeking information about their current and previous volunteer activity, about their potential involvement in volunteer work, and about the barriers to their involvement in volunteering in the town. Instrument

development incorporated information from studies carried out elsewhere and included questions which seek information about specific organisations or specific types of volunteer-involving organisations. As will be discussed later this form of data collection did not provide the depth of information yielded from the focus group discussions which followed.

The focus groups in each location involved an informal discussion with a set of guiding questions used to stimulate discussion but did not confine the discussion to those issues identified by the researchers in advance. As a result the data collection followed an emergent strategy and followed matters of interest which developed in each of the locations as well as exploring those which had already emerged at earlier locations.

In addition, issues which had emerged at the community group meetings in Part A of the study were explored as these informed the study as it grew. It is important to note that themes overtly identified in later discussions by the participants themselves were subsequently identified has having been present in earlier discussions where verbatim quotes had been recorded, and also in the free response data collected in the survey documents - both the newcomers' questionnaires and the surveys distributed for Part A of this study.

Data Analysis

Data analysis involved both statistical data analysis and coding of qualitative data. This was completed utilising quantitative and qualitative methods. Survey data was analysed using SPSS, and a combination of descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Focus groups were not recorded or transcribed but notes were taken which included verbatim quotes. These notes were then analysed using deductive and inductive procedures to categorise and identify common themes. QSR NVivo was used in this process.

What resulted is presented in a form which identifies the key themes and issues which emerged from both the questionnaires and the focus groups.

RESULTS

Respondent profile

Most of the completed surveys were received by the researchers at the focus/discussion group meetings but 6 were received through other sources, including mail. Forty one completed questionnaires were received, with thirty eight being useable. Of these the majority were completed by females (27 or 71%). Only two of the completed surveys were completed by people with children under ten in their household, with eleven being completed by people with school age children in the household (29%). Only 3 were completed by people for whom English is a second language, and only 1 by a person with Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander heritage. Nine people were not born in Australia and twelve had parents not born in Australia. Eight people reported having a disability and many of those indicated back injury (5). One person selected both YES and NO to this question.

Answers to the employment questions were complex with many of the respondents selecting a mix of answers - for example "retired" "home duties" "casual or on call" and "seasonal full time" were all selected by one individual. Another individual selected FIFO, employee and "more than one job". Answers to these questions did not yield statistically easily interpreted data. Should this question be used again another format will be required.

Age groups represented by respondents were limited to 31 plus. None of the respondents were 30 or under and only 2 were over 70 years of age.

Thirty of the respondents indicated that they had been active volunteers in their previous community, and ten indicated that they are active here. Of the 38 respondents 27 indicated an interest in volunteering "here" with the responses ranging from very interested to somewhat interested. Only three indicated "very interested". A topic which links this response with qualitative data is discussed shortly.

Of those who indicated that they were not interested, there were three who were not really interested, three who were "not interested at all" and the remainder did not answer this question. The remaining respondents consisted of one who did not answer this question and four of the ten already active volunteers in the local community.

When asked what might influence them to change their mind, "being personally asked" was the response circled by all.

28 respondents indicated that they felt it was "very likely" or "somewhat likely" to volunteer in the next twelve months. 21 people indicated emergency services were a likely place in which they would volunteer but the spread amongst other types of volunteer roles led to the conclusion that fundraising activities, followed by service clubs and church activities were the least likely to receive the services of these potential volunteers. The sample is not big enough for this pattern to be considered statistically significant.

The remaining quantitative data has been incorporated into the qualitative data analysis which follows.

Qualitative data

The profile of respondents who participated in the "newcomer" focus/discussion groups in each location is similar to the profile of those who completed the questionnaires. Differences will be that there were six questionnaires received via other methods and one person telephoned the chief investigator rather than complete a questionnaire. Separate demographic data was not collected for the focus group discussions because participants had just completed the questionnaires.

Thematic analysis of the data collected in focus groups and from the free response sections in the surveys revealed some very important themes which elaborated on the quantitative data, and there were some themes not evident in the quantitative data which proved to be consistent across the different locations. These themes have been identified below with some verbatim quotes offered which capture the essence of what was said on a number of occasions across a range of venues.

Why did people relocate to the town/region?
Relocation reasons varied, and many of the respondents indicated more than one reason. Family was the most prevalent reason, but there were also lifestyle change (tree change), work (move initiated by respondent) and work (move initiated by employer) responses. What was not revealed in the questionnaires but which emerged in discussions was that many of those who were new to the town or region had relocated from other towns or regions as well as from the metropolitan area. Some of those who were present in the discussions were former locals who had returned after time away, either at university or for employment reasons. There were also some who participated in discussions who had relocated to the town due to their partner being relocated for work.

The concept of newcomer
For the purposes of our research we classified newcomers as having relocated to the town in the last five years. That being said we continually came across the idea that even those who had moved to town far less recently might still be considered to be newcomers. In one of the community group discussions held in association with the companion project in community organisations, it was remarked by one participant that they had been in town for 15 years and therefore might *almost qualify as a local* [emphasis recorded in contemporaneous notes]. At another location, when talking about their previous town one of the participants said that in [name of town deleted] you are *not a local till you've been there 20 years.* This concept of not being a local was reflected in a different manner in some places where the concept of local "cliques" and being an outsider were discussed.

Cliques and outsiders
In one meeting a participant indicated that "this town is different to other towns - it's not cliquey". A remark which drew concealed laughter from a couple of people and was refuted by another participant.

This concept of cliques came up in a number of forms over the course of data collection. Analysis initially separated the concept of a town being "cliquey" from the idea that there was a group which seemed to be present in many of the community groups, dominated meetings and gatherings, and led to newcomers feeling like outsiders. It soon became apparent in thematic analysis, however that this was in fact a concept which was one and the same.

Intentional or not, newcomers reported feeling intimidated by this group. One newcomer made a comment which was recorded as: *Same faces at each place – reputation precedes them*, a reference to the fact that despite making attempts to join several different organisations newcomers would encounter the same people in a number of places, and after a while the reputation of this group was well known to all. In another group discussion newcomers had a discussion about the fact that after you have been in town a little while you soon learn *who not to talk about – The "names" that are still here* making reference to the fact that there are family names which are prevalent in a town, both in families and on streets and buildings. Reference was made in this discussion to the "autocracy of the town born and bred". Comments such as these were not confined to one town or place, and participants in the groups in each town who had come from other towns reported similar experiences elsewhere. This will be returned to later in this report.

Special cases

In three of the four towns that were visited as part of the newcomers project there were special cases which led to segregation in the community and influenced how the volunteer community operates.

In one this was due to the existence of an insular religious community which has particular rules about interaction with the wider community outside their Christian "sect". The same religious group in a nearby town has in fact commenced some limited volunteer activity outside their own organisation to help out the volunteer ambulance service. This venture into new territory is being viewed positively by members of the ambulance service who have been accommodating in their acceptance of the limited role the religious volunteers are able to take. In the town in which data collection was taking place no such move has been made and there was discussion as to whether this was a product of the leaders of the religious organisation or the leaders of the town having views which prevent such a move just yet.

In another town it was the influx of fly-in fly-out workers who were unable to commit to regular volunteer activity, and their families who were unable to leave children unattended while their partner was away at work in order to commit to regular volunteer activity. In addition when their partner is in town the newcomers would prefer to undertake activities as a family and to spend time volunteering and joining groups together. Their different lifestyle invites a different type of volunteering.

A third "special case" is the group of people being allocated to state housing in a town. These families were from lower socio economic backgrounds and in one case seemed to be located in one particular area of the town. Anecdotal evidence from the participants at the workshops and focus groups seems to be that they don't have experience of volunteering, or of joining community groups and would not seek such activities, but might be willing if the approach was made and possibilities opened up to them. The discussion of cliques and feeling welcome (above) resurfaced in relation to this because it would be more daunting for a newcomer who had no previous experience of volunteering to "stick it out until they no longer felt quite so alien".

An additional different type of newcomer became apparent due to a telephone response from an individual who decided not to complete a survey but who felt they could contribute to the research. This person is employed by the Education Department in a high school in one of the towns. She could be classified as a "commuting newcomer". Instead of relocating with her family to the town she commutes on Sunday and Friday evenings from what she considers to be her home in the metropolitan area to her work/temporary accommodation in the town. She has not joined any clubs or sporting organisations in the town, preferring instead to still play sport for her metropolitan club, and to train by herself during the week. She has not really participated in any of the local volunteer organisations as she sees herself as only visiting and does not intend to stay in town for any length of time. This newcomer is not alone.

Discussions with others in later focus groups revealed that residents knew of others who were adopting this approach to their appointments to the town, and not only teachers but other newcomers including nursing staff who returned to Perth when they were not rostered on, and Department of Agriculture staff who worked a 9-day fortnight or flexible hours to achieve a similar sort of "commuting" residency. It is not known how widespread this practice is but discussion in focus groups led to discussion about past practices where the new teacher, the new police officer, the new agriculture department worker and the new nurses would be part of a family who would make their way into the town by joining local organisations, volunteering in the schools and other places as a way to meet people. "Some still do that" was a comment in one discussion, "but many don't" came the response in one discussion. These "commuting" residents will be adding to the need for services at times (e.g. ambulance service in the event of illness or accident, or firefighting service in the event their accommodation should catch fire) without being a part of the service itself. Together with the fly in fly out workers, this new way of commuting to work affects the participation in community organisations from two different perspectives.

Barriers to volunteering

Barriers to volunteering reported by newcomers ranged from petrol costs and distance from town to limited information about opportunities and social anxiety. There was also discussion of not wanting to take on too much, not having a clear indication of time commitments, being uncertain about what might be involved, and a feeling about the "closed shop" experienced in some organisations.

Costs, timing and time

Flexibility in rostering or allocating duties, and acceptance of a different approach came up repeatedly in discussions. One volunteer referred to the fact that they have brought their own business to town and as part of making their way into the community they have been along to a number of volunteer groups and clubs, but that it had proved to be difficult to commit to any regular activity until their business is up and running. The concern which they expressed was that the clubs or groups tended to want someone who was prepared to give a regular weekly or monthly commitment from the outset and at this stage they were unable to offer that because they were trying to establish their business. In another group discussion one newcomer suggested that she would like to be able to be involved in the fortnight her partner was away on fly in fly out work rosters but did not want to commit to the weeks he was in town. She felt that this need was not met by the style of rosters at the clubs and committees she might be interested in. She specifically referred to the dates of training for the volunteer emergency services in the town.

In the same discussion another person who had previously been on a fly in fly out roster herself indicated that she too had not been able to join the emergency services volunteer groups because of the rigourous training schedule not fitting in with her previous work rosters. This volunteer indicated that she is a trained fire fighter, having had a role in the emergency response team in the mine in which she worked, and lamented that her experience should be captured. A volunteer in the room however indicated that the subject had not, to his knowledge, been raised with the SES volunteer service in the town. A clear case of a need for communicating newcomers' needs.

In many of the towns the lack of volunteers for sporting clubs came up, accompanied by the lack of players to field teams. Smaller numbers in each of the clubs meant that in some towns the same people were operating the committees for many of the teams. Discussion of the old practice of someone knocking on the door of the new teacher in town to ask if they would join the footy club was accompanied by the comment that often they don't want to join the local club, preferring instead to commute at weekends to play for their Perth club. The barrier here is associated with the commuting newcomer, a subject which will be returned to later.

The discussion in one group focussed on the fact that in the past people would drive into town during the day for one set of activities and then back into town in the evening, or that women from outlying towns and properties would drive to each other's places and come into town together. Increasing petrol costs now meant that people tended not to drive as far or as often as they used to. This led

to discussion of the timing of evening meetings – a trend that was repeated in other venues. In many places the only place to get a meal in the evening is at the pub, except on Friday night when the sporting club was open in one place. The hours the pub serves meals (6-8 in one place) meant that meetings after work could not be followed by a meal at the pub, and the local café closing at 5.30pm meant that cheaper meals or a snack between business hours and a 6.30pm meeting were not possible. This was an interesting sideline to the idea of driving into town for evening meetings. This pattern of not much open in the evening was repeated in other places but was not universal.

Information

In all locations there was discussion of how newcomers could find out what volunteering opportunities were available without committing themselves to one place, group or role. Newcomers expressed a fear that they might end up with more work than they were looking for if they put their hand up to help out in a volunteer role, or that if they went to a community organisation they did not really know what they might be letting themselves in for.

Many newcomers found it difficult to know where to go and what to do. In some places a newsletter or local paper contained advertising and information but often this was vague or too general to allow the newcomer to know what sort of commitment might be needed. "Volunteers wanted" for the local museum was insufficient to allow a person with only a few hours to spare a month to decide to phone up. The local council in this location had changed their advertising to include more detailed job descriptions and details of time commitments, with more successful outcomes.

A discussion of this in each of the groups led to the conclusion that potential volunteers want to know what they are letting themselves in for. Further discussion led to the conclusion that an old "truism" in volunteering, that word of mouth and a photo story in the local paper, is more effective than advertising. Newcomers did, however, express the need for some detailed information before they would go to a meeting or event. In one location one newcomer told of an incident in a previous town where they had answered an ad in a local paper accompanied by a photo story seeking assistance only to find that the previous person had been pushed out of the job by a committee who wanted things done a particular way.

There was discussion in each of the locations about fairs, expos, newcomers recruiting days and annual welcome events. In some places this has been a regular occurrence and in others it is part of the regular field day or fete in town. We continually found people who had arrived soon after one of these had been held and by the time the next one came around felt that too much time had passed for them to be recruited in this way (this was particularly true when the event was annual). In one town the comment was made that the event included more of the local organisations themselves than any potential new volunteers and merely served to make work for the already busy volunteers. One person commented that there were more current volunteers present than new faces.

In a town not in the Wheatbelt a group of newcomers to the town have started a "new to town" once per month meeting to which all newcomers are invited and welcome at which representatives of the local volunteer resource centre and some other organisations often come and talk but where the focus is actually on meeting other newcomers. Discussion of this type of operation led to discussion of who might be responsible for supporting such a service. Local council staff are already stretched to the limit with the community services type role often being a role which is only part of the workload of a full time person. Councils, do, however send out newcomers' packs to new ratepayers in the local area and in some locations send out information on community organisations in these packs. Newcomers' packs go to new ratepayers but new rental tenants tend not to receive these and so many newcomers are not included in such mailouts. In the discussions with newcomers the role of the real estate agents in town came up but there was varying levels of trust in the real estate salesperson as a source of information on the potential volunteer activity in the town. In one location there was significant information provided by a local agent, but only about certain groups and clubs, and his family tended to dominate these clubs and organisations. Perhaps a circle back to the "clique" references earlier.

Many newcomers thought that they would be interested in information about potential volunteer activity but without any pressure to "join" or sign up for a regular role.

Social anxiety and feeling included

Social anxiety was an area of mixed results. In the survey form quite a number of people (18) indicated that someone to volunteer with would make it easier for them to volunteer but exploration of this concept in discussion was more revealing. Newcomers expect to have to go to meetings or events as a newcomer but find it easier to know there are likely to be other newcomers there at the same time. In many instances it is the second or third time that is more difficult. Either they were worried that they might end up as an office bearer or other burdensome workload role as discussed above. One participant stated that they had felt that some organisations "Want your labour but not your ideas" and the discussion went on to conclude that whilst your ideas may not be suitable for the organisation it "would be nice to have your ideas discussed". This theme of wanting to contribute or be heard was encountered across the four towns, with data from one town indicating that there were some sporting clubs which had previously operated this way but had recently been "taken over" by a younger generation of committee members. One participant reported that when she had taken on the role of chair in a local club she encountered longer term volunteers who get disgruntled at the new way of organising things but that generally there is acceptance that someone else is doing the work and so they have to accept the change. This new committee member is considered to be a "local", having returned to the region after studying in the city and so she agreed that her ideas and new approach might be more accepted than the changes implemented by a "newcomer".

Interest in volunteering

Only a small number of participants in the survey (6) indicated that they were not really interested or not at all interested in volunteering. From the reasons offered in the questionnaire the following reasons were selected as major reasons:

- *Time commitments,*
- *Family commitments,*
- *Petrol costs, health,*
- *Previous bad experience with volunteering,*
- *Don't feel welcome and*
- *Don't know what volunteer opportunities are available.*

In addition *Planning to move away/on, Don't feel competent, Worried about legal liability* were selected as minor reasons.

The following reasons were not selected by any respondent as being a reason (major or minor) for not volunteering: *Business/farming takes up most of my time, Employer would not encourage, Age, Don't know anyone who volunteers, People seem so competent, There's nothing in it for me, Never been interested in volunteering.*

In the focus groups it was apparent that even the one person who initially indicated he was only there because his wife brought him was not averse to the idea of volunteering at some point in the future. This means that those who are not interested in volunteering at all are not represented in this sample.

Those who were not yet volunteering but who expressed an interest were asked to specify what sort of volunteer activity they might be interested in. The responses ranged through the whole spectrum, although committee work, church activities and disability support services were the least selected. Numbers tended to be highest in the somewhat interested category rather than the very interested category. Responses to the question about what might influence them to take up volunteering tended to indicate that

- *Being personally asked,*
- *Flexibility in rosters to allow for work/or other commitments,*
- *Clear information about time commitments,*

- *Reimbursement of costs (e.g. petrol) and*
- *Someone to volunteer with*

would be very helpful and that more *information about opportunities*, and *mentoring for new recruits* would be somewhat helpful.

Overcoming barriers

Those who had indicated that they were not at all or not really interested in volunteering selected the following responses as being extremely likely or somewhat likely to influence them to volunteer:

- *See a need,*
- *Being personally asked,*
- *More information about opportunities,*
- *More information about organisations,*
- *More information about who volunteers,*
- *Flexibility in rosters to allow for work/or other commitments,*
- *Clear information about time commitments,*
- *Reimbursement of costs (e.g. petrol),*
- *Someone to volunteer with*

with the following responses not selected as being likely by the respondents:

Need skills, Someone available to help with children, Subsidy for transport, Set intake dates for new volunteers, Disability support

Despite not being selected by respondents, discussion about what sorts of things might influence newcomers to change their mind about volunteering in the focus groups led to the conclusion that there were potential volunteers "out there" who would benefit from knowing they could bring their children or have their children cared for while they volunteer. In one community the insurance implications of having children around when the extensive training for emergency services volunteering was taking place was discussed. Participants knew of potential volunteers (both newcomers and not) who would be good at logistics or communications volunteering but who could not leave their children to attend training. "In the event that their skills were needed for a real emergency the neighbours would always take the children" was a comment made.

This led to discussions about operating a system whereby the community organisation investigated being able to bring in groups of people with young children who would train together for similar roles, whose children would be able to be cared for as a group by other volunteers during training, and who could then share the duties for which they had been trained during an emergency as well as sharing responsibility for children. "The children would also already know each other" was one comment. One of the volunteers indicated that they would take this idea back to their organisation but there was then a concern on the part of others about the insurance, head office approval and how easy it would be to convince more senior people in the organisation of the potential for this idea.

One volunteer indicated that they had been unable to take their son to the centre from which the bushfire brigade deploys due to the insurance requirements. Such a discussion, however, illustrates that the community has the capacity to generate ideas which might lead to increased volunteer rates, but perhaps the space to debate such ideas needs to be created. The tendency to see the obstacles to the ideas coming to fruition was evident in a number of discussions.

On the subject of set intake dates for volunteers, the idea that people might join up and be "new" all together was appealing but generally the discussion tended to favour people being able to join up when they were ready and not have to wait until set intake dates. Similar to the idea of annual recruitment drives or days there was a tendency for focus group participants to feel that people reach a point at which they are likely to volunteer sometime after arrival and settling in, and not necessarily in accordance with a timetable set by others.

Sporting organisations tend to have season beginnings which are well publicised and people who are new to town will often wait to the beginning of a new season to join up to play in a team. Volunteers for committees and other positions within the clubs then tend to be appointed at AGMs from amongst the membership and new people may be appointed after having had time to get to know the club and its politics.

In two focus groups there was discussion of a changing of the guard in sporting clubs where a younger generation had taken over the governance roles in the organisation. In one case this had happened where the return to town of a number of younger people had seen the executive of one particular sporting organisation taken over by the next generation in similar families to those who had previously taken on these roles. This, to some degree, reinforced the concept discussed earlier, about the same families and names being present in all the community organisations.

In the other situation, however, new names and new faces from amongst the membership, both longer term volunteers and newcomers, had stepped up when it looked like the sporting club would have to fold if new people did not take on the roles. Assistance had been provided by a government department to seek some funding for facilities upgrades by the new committee and membership numbers had increased as a result of the efforts of the new committee and the new funding.

Making it easier to continue

Newcomers who are already active volunteers, when asked what would make it easier for them to continue to volunteer, considered:

- *Better facilities/equipment,*
- *More training,*
- *Better financial support for organisations,*
- *Better recognition of volunteers*

to be somewhat helpful by most of the active volunteers, but:

- *Flexibility in rosters to allow for work commitments,*
- *Clear information about time commitments,*
- *More people to help*

were considered to be very helpful. This reinforced the idea that organisations and clubs may need to look at the time commitments required by their volunteers, and how this might be made more flexible to attract and keep more volunteers.

DISCUSSION

Volunteering is an activity undertaken of one's own free will, having made an informed choice to be of benefit to the community and without remuneration other than allowance or reimbursement of out of pocket expenses. It is clear from the data that the three key themes to be considered by volunteer involving organisations in wheatbelt towns need to be explored to see whether they are applicable to a particular town/region and their organisations are:

- Clear information about the nature, types and time commitments required by organisations
- Flexibility in approach

and

- A need to breakdown barriers which lead people to believe that their labour is welcome but perhaps not their new ideas or approaches.

Information about opportunities

The first theme has begun to be addressed in some towns. Instead of blanket calls for more volunteers, advertisements for particular types of volunteer roles set out clear job descriptions and duties have begun to attract new volunteers who see the specifics of the proposed role and think "I can do that".

This message was one which was proving to be quite effective in bringing in new people. In other cases, however, the advertised workload seems daunting to the newcomer who may then decide not to volunteer because of the volume of work involved. Organisations may need to consider whether roles can be split or reorganised to reduce the time commitment required by the role. An example of this is the role of secretary within a club or organisation which can be broken into correspondence secretary and minute secretary thus enabling two people to take it on. In this way the need expressed by some about having someone to volunteer with may be addressed as well.

Avenues for advertising or communicating such information may need to be explored. People often only read advertisements if they are looking for something in particular. Some of the special cases discussed above may not be actively seeking to volunteer in the town or region and therefore would not notice articles or advertisements in the local paper. A commuting volunteer may be attracted to a once per month meeting role on a weeknight where they do not have to commit to weekends to undertake the role, but they may not be looking in the local paper to find it. Similarly two fly in fly out workers or partners may be prepared to share a role if an organisation is prepared to allow them to do this.

Finding
- Clear information is required to enable potential volunteers to assess the nature, types and time commitments required by community organisations.

Assistance for clubs and organisations seeking to communicate this information to newcomers and to other potential volunteers who may not have considered volunteering before is an avenue to be explored.

Flexibility

- Role sharing;
- the timing of meetings;
- developing options in rosters;
- examining how and when training is offered and considering how childcare (and maybe eldercare) can be incorporated into the operations of the organisation to enable volunteering to take place,

are all matters which could be explored by community organisations. Examples which have been offered in some towns include changing the time of the regular meeting to an earlier time when businesses have just closed, and making the meeting an event which happens over a mealtime, incorporating, in one example, takeaway pizza, so that people do not go home and then have to come back to town for the meeting.

Examples which were discussed in the focus groups included looking at the time commitment for training and looking to see if components of the training could be broken down into smaller chunks to allow individuals to become trained in one aspect of the role at a time (eg radio operations or equipment repair and maintenance) making them useful to the organisation without asking them to commit as much time before they feel as though they are ready/belong. One example of this is the ambulance service volunteers who do not roster on for call outs but who are prepared to be included in the roster for cleaning and restocking the ambulance discussed above.

Finding
- Flexibility in the approach of community organisations is needed to make it possible for a wider range of people to volunteer.

  This second theme is directly related to the first. Community organisations may need to be more flexible when looking at how rostering, meeting times, training and other commitments can be reconfigured to allow for different time demands of some potential volunteers.

Welcoming newcomers

The most prominent theme, however, is the most difficult: The long standing volunteers who seem to a newcomer to be competent, involved, know everyone and maybe even unwilling to take on new ideas and approaches. The barrier of the "in group" is one which kept coming up in discussions.   It can be experienced in any organisation and for some newcomers this is not a barrier. They are experienced at moving to a new town, making themselves known to those who have been there a long time, and finding a way to make themselves useful and involved in the organisation. For others, it can be intimidating to feel as though you are wanted for your labour but not your ideas - even if the existing volunteers or committee members are unaware of this impression. In some groups, the organisational politics is part of the culture of the organisation and what the newcomer sees or perceives, is also considered to be the case by others in the town or region. Feeling as though you are still a newcomer after 20 years is probably a product of history and shared experiences rather than a deliberate attempt by residents to exclude new people.

In some organisations, however, there are ways in which the organisation operates which exclude new people - whether it is deliberate or not. Examples include: having ideas for new ways of rostering dismissed without discussion, being told your idea won't work without it even being considered, or polite silence when an idea is put on the table. Even more exclusive is the meeting or operations which take place outside the official meeting or operations so that those who are not "in the purple circle" as one newcomer put it, are not privy to the discussion or the decision which is put on the table as a fait accompli at the meeting.

Many long term volunteers in organisations will claim that the lobbying and "behind the scenes" work which happens outside the meetings or away from the day to day operations of the organisation are the ones which make the activities go more smoothly and the meetings shorter. The research conducted at a local level in the US provides indicators that the local leadership and gatekeepers in organisations can have a significant impact on the success or otherwise of implementing a new programme in those communities. It is likely that this same effect is in place in terms of the ease with which newcomers can make their way in to existing organisations and is a subject for further consideration, particularly in view of the work done by Handy and Cnaan (2007) on the role of social anxiety, discussed in the literature review.

Finding
- There is a need to break down perceptions of an "inner circle" or "closed shop" in some organisations/towns/regions to encourage newcomers to volunteer and to continue to volunteer.

  Community organisations may need assistance to develop strategies to break down perceptions of an "inner circle" or "closed shop" and to make newcomers feel included.

It may be that organisations need to stop and think about whether there needs to be a forum for accepting and trying new approaches and ideas. One danger in this is alienating the existing volunteers, and another is burdening the newcomer with the responsibility for the new idea when it does not work, or with all the work associated with making it work. Sometimes it is necessary for an outsider to help organisations facilitate some of the navel gazing which must take place for culture change to occur. Unless it is a deliberate attempt by an organisation to exclude newcomers, the current members or volunteers are likely to be unable to see how their actions may lead to a perception of being cliquey or exclusive.

Such thinking can also be a barrier to organisations choosing to share services, premises or expertise in such things as grant applications as well. None of us likes to think of ourselves as excluding others deliberately so being able to see where our actions are doing exactly that is likely to be extremely difficult. Laments that the younger people in a town are not interested in our organisation may actually be a symptom that their ideas are not being heard or tried, or that the organisation may need to look at whether it is projecting an image of not accepting change. Maybe instead of having young people join an organisation helping them set up their own which can work with towards similar goals might be a better option.

Support for organisations

It is apparent that there are many ideas and options which are held by the current and potential volunteers in organisations which can be pooled to assist organisations, towns and regions to better improve volunteering by newcomers. It is also apparent that mechanisms for sharing these ideas and options are currently limited in some locations.

Where volunteer resource centres operate some work is being done to assist local organisations, but no resource centre is located in any of the four locations visited. In each of these locations the assistance of a community development officer or similar person employed by the local council was sought to facilitate data collection. It became apparent that these staff members are somewhat under resourced and that the council perception of their role in relation to volunteering is different and in some cases they are largely unsupported in relation to this aspect of their job. Cuthill and Warburton (2005) argue that the efforts of governments on all levels can boost a culture of volunteering. It is clear from this study, however, that the efforts of governments need to be aimed at supporting the organisations themselves and providing assistance for sharing of ideas and services.

Finding
- Specialist support should be offered by Volunteering WA to whoever is undertaking the role of facilitating volunteering in each town or region, but there is a need for increased personnel located in the town or region itself to undertake a support role for volunteers and organisations to help them explore and develop the ideas and options available to them.

CONCLUSION and IMPLICATIONS

This discussion paper reports on themes identified in the part of the project funded by a starter grant from the Faculty of Business and Law at Edith Cowan University to examine the barriers to newcomers volunteering in wheatbelt towns. The research was conducted using questionnaires and focus groups in four wheatbelt locations chosen because of their different demographic profiles. Some consistency with findings made in other locations, including in the US and Britain, leads to the conclusion that volunteer involving organisations in other locations are grappling with similar issues.

Key needs which emerged can be identified as:

- Clear information is required to enable potential volunteers to assess the nature, types and time commitments required by organisations when recruiting new volunteers

- Flexibility in approach within and between organisations is needed to make it possible for a wider range of people to volunteer;

and

- Strategies to break down perceptions of an "inner circle" in some organisations/towns/regions

- Community organisations need guidance or assistance in co-ordinating or implementing strategies which might address these.

Some level of assistance is available from the local councils in each location, and from Volunteering WA but it is apparent that in the absence of a local Volunteer Resource Centre, personnel and resources which are local to the region, and focussed on volunteering and community organisations could provide a more strategic approach to the support needed.

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