

# Volunteerism: Alive and Well or Dying Quietly?

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Learnings from New Zealand community-based organisations, volunteerism experts and social enterprises



A reworked extract from a wider report on volunteering in Plunket. The wider report was produced for the Royal New Zealand Plunket Society under the auspices of the Wattie's Plunket Volunteer Grant 2013.

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To contact the author: please email: [michelle.wanwimolruk@gmail.com](mailto:michelle.wanwimolruk@gmail.com) or [michelle@consultmw.co.nz](mailto:michelle@consultmw.co.nz)

## About the Author

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Michelle Wanwimolruk is a consultant specialising in projects involving stakeholder engagement, strategy and internal reviews. She is passionate about making a positive difference and social change, and enjoys working for clients who share these passions. Michelle is also a former diplomat and has worked in New York, New Delhi and Wellington. As a diplomat she worked across a range of issues in foreign policy and international trade negotiations. Michelle is a Thai-New Zealander and values her Asian heritage and multiculturalism. Michelle has held various directorships/governance roles in the not-for-profit/community sector. Her current volunteer energies are devoted to working on a unique social enterprise start-up that combines her interests in early childhood education, entrepreneurship and philanthropy. From time to time, she also undertakes pro bono consulting work.

Michelle LinkedIn Profile can be viewed at: <http://www.linkedin.com/in/michellewanwimolruk>

Contact details: [michelle@consultmw.co.nz](mailto:michelle@consultmw.co.nz) or [michelle.wanwimolruk@gmail.com](mailto:michelle.wanwimolruk@gmail.com)

## Acknowledgements

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I would like to thank all the wonderful volunteer managers, volunteer leaders, volunteerism experts, social entrepreneurs and organisations who agreed to talk with me. Thank you for sharing your insights, learnings, practices and resources with me, so that it can be shared with others. Everyone interviewed was a pleasure to meet and I am humbled by the fantastic work that you all do.

I am also immensely grateful for the support of the Royal New Zealand Plunket Society and Wattie's. I was the lucky recipient of the biennial Wattie's Plunket Volunteer Grant in 2013. The consulting project completed under the auspices of the grant was focused on volunteering in Plunket - past, present and future. The learnings from other community-based organisations, volunteerism experts and social entrepreneurs was a section of the wider report. This paper "Volunteerism: Alive and Well or Dying Quietly?" has been reworked from that section. For a full copy of the section, which is a public, open-source document, please see "Volunteerism Today: Best Practice, Innovation and Challenges".

## 1.1. Introduction

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Not-for-profits, community-based organisations and social enterprises have volunteerism at its roots, and for many at its heart. The 'Third Sector' is still commonly known to many as the 'Voluntary Sector'. Yet in recent years, many involved in the Third Sector have bemoaned declining volunteer numbers. Social, cultural, economic and technological changes have led to major changes in the volunteering landscape. Contrary to popular belief, volunteering is alive and well, and even flourishing in some pockets. However, volunteering has changed. What are the key success factors for the organisations that are doing well in the volunteering space? What are some common challenges? What learnings can be shared for the benefit of others in the Third Sector?

This paper will examine four case studies of organisations that are very successful with volunteers. Bellyful, the Home of Compassion Soup Kitchen, Kaibosh, and Ronald McDonald House are examples of organisations where volunteering is 'flourishing'. There is much we can learn from these organisations. Furthermore, through interviews with over 30 organisations, experts, and social entrepreneurs in New Zealand, key themes and factors for successful volunteering have been drawn. Factors for success include leadership and culture, communication, mandate and purpose, and having skilled and well-resourced managers of volunteers

Common challenges and 'threats' to volunteering also emerged as a theme from all the interviews. Many volunteer managers perceived they were the least resourced unit in their organisation. Also there can be conflict or tension between long-term volunteers and the 'organisation'. While they will not readily admit it, some NFPs see their volunteers as a bit of a 'nuisance', as the stalwarts that hold back progress. More open discussion about conflict and tension is needed. There is also a need for greater recognition in the Third Sector of the importance and value of investment in volunteer programmes and volunteer management.

This report is about learning from others. As one interviewee said: "We all need to 'rob and duplicate' more in the community sector. Take the good elements of what others are doing and copy/adapt it (for local conditions)." I hope this report can be a useful resources for many people in the Third Sector.

## 1.2. 'Volunteering': definition, concept and changes

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### Definition and volunteering as a 'cultural concept'

This paper uses the 'mainstream' definition of volunteering common in Western culture. That volunteering is activity undertaken:

- Not for financial gain
- Bringing benefit to a third party (other than the volunteer's immediate family)
- Of one's own free will

- Generally through a community organisation/not-for-profit organisation<sup>1</sup>

It is important to acknowledge that ‘volunteering’ is essentially a Pākehā/Western concept, and European in origin. This conceptualisation of volunteering has an inherent bias towards ‘formal volunteering’ done by ‘white middle class people’. For many decades, the typical stereotype of a volunteer was that of a “middle-aged, middle-class, white female”, a “Lady Bountiful”.<sup>2</sup> Today, there is more diversity of people engaged in formal volunteering in terms of age, gender, ethnicity and class,. However, there is still a bias towards its origins and there is limited understanding or acknowledgement of how other cultures work in a collectivist way.

Most non-Pākehā ethnic groups do not have an equivalent term to ‘volunteering’ in their language. The concept of formal volunteering does not fit comfortably within other cultural frameworks.<sup>3</sup> Within a collectivist cultural tradition such as Māori, Pacific Island, Asian, Islamic cultures, notions of the ‘self’ are very different from that of the ‘self’ in Western culture. Furthermore, it may not be possible to distinguish the whanau/family from the wider hapu/iwi/community. The following quotes illustrates this:

When I get up as a Pākehā and mow my lawns, I mow my lawns ... When I go down the road to the disabled children’s home and mow their lawns I volunteer to do something for the other ... When my friend Huhana gets up and mows her lawns, she mows her lawns, when she goes down to the Kōhanga Reo and mows lawns, she mows her lawns. When she moves across and mows the lawns at the Marae and the Hauora, she mows her lawns—because there is no sense of ‘other’.<sup>4</sup>

It should be noted that the distinction between personal caring for family members and contributing to the wider society is similarly blurred in other cultural groups. For Pacific peoples and other ethnic groups ... many areas of caring activity, community participation and advocacy ... would not be perceived as ‘voluntary’.<sup>5</sup>

## Changes in volunteering

Volunteering has changed. The changes in the landscape of volunteering are due to many inter-related changes. These include social, cultural, economic, and technological changes in New Zealand and most of the world. In the New Zealand context, interviewees cited statistics and research to show that contrary to popular belief, volunteering is not on the decline. The rate of volunteering has in fact, stayed steady over the last few decades, despite dramatic social changes in New Zealand. However, what has changed is the way people volunteer. People are volunteering differently than they did in the past. The changes include:

- People want to volunteer for shorter amounts of time (this trend includes project volunteering, episodic volunteering, specific time-bound regular volunteering);

<sup>1</sup> Expanded from Gaskin, K and Davis Smith, J (1997) *A New Civic Europe? A study of the extent and role of volunteering*, cited in Royal NZ Plunket Society (2013) *Supporting Plunket Volunteers: A Guide for Mangers of Plunket Volunteer Activities*

<sup>2</sup> ‘Lady Bountiful’ is a character from a play by George Farquhar. “She is a rich country lady who devotes her time to helping her less fortunate neighbours. She has become a proverbial figure.” (*Bloomsbury Dictionary of English Literature*, 1997, quoted in Wilson (2001).

<sup>3</sup> Wilson, C. (2001), *The Changing Face of Social Service Volunteering: A Literature Review*, <https://www.msd.govt.nz/documents/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/archive/2001-changingfaceofsocialexecutive.pdf>, Ministry of Social Development, New Zealand.

<sup>4</sup> Quote from Stansfield, 2001 quoted in Wilson 2001.

<sup>5</sup> The New Zealand Community and Voluntary Sector Working Party (MSP, 2001, quoted in Wilson)

- People want a specific role or task (there is a trend towards more clearly defined roles);
- People want to do what they like and are good at;
- People are more willing to vote with their feet - if the volunteering is not working for them, there are plenty of other options.

All of this means that volunteers are becoming more selective in what volunteer work they do. What makes some NFPs more attractive to volunteers and more able to retain volunteers compared with other NFPs? The next section examines four case studies.

## 1.3. Case studies of ‘excellence’

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Volunteerism is indeed flourishing in some pockets. While some organisations despair at declining volunteer numbers, a select few organisations have “waiting lists” for their volunteer programmes, or are growing their volunteer numbers. This section looks at four such organisations through the lenses of the manager/leader of volunteers: Bellyful, Kaibosh, Suzanne Aubert Soup Kitchen, and Ronald McDonald House Wellington. While they vary in terms of sector, size, and volunteer demographic, there are some common attributes which will be discussed in section 1.3.4.

### 1.3.1. Bellyful New Zealand

Bellyful is a nationwide not-for-profit charitable organisation, whose volunteers cook and deliver free meals to families with a new baby and families struggling with illness. Bellyful was established six years ago and it is entirely volunteer-run at this stage<sup>6</sup>. There are twenty branches with 600 volunteers. There is a board of trustees at the national level, an Executive Director and three Area Managers. The twenty branches report to one of the Area Managers.

Bellyful has an easy to follow business model. Each branch is made up of about 25 volunteers. Once they have fundraised enough money they hold their first cookathon, cooking 80-100 meals. These meals are put into a central freezer. People make referrals to Bellyful, then volunteers from the branch group pick up food from freezer and deliver to families in the community. Cook-a-thons are then held every 4-6 weeks.

At branch level, there are the following key roles and teams:

- Branch Coordinator: lead responsibility for branch
- Cook-a-thon Coordinator: responsible for preparation for and running of the cookathon
- Recipient Coordinator: receives referrals, finds volunteers to pick up meals and deliver meals to family.
- Fundraising Coordinator: responsible for branch fundraising. Each branch has to fundraise about \$8000 per year to cover costs (containers, food products, freezer space hire/storage etc)

There are job descriptions for all the above roles. Other branch volunteers cook, deliver, fundraise or do all three roles. Volunteers know what is expected of them and how they can fit their volunteering in with the rest of their lives.

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<sup>6</sup> At the time the interviews took place in early 2014, even the national position of Executive Director and the Area managers were unpaid/voluntary positions. Though this may have changed since the time of the interviews.

## Learnings from Jacqui Ritchie, Executive Director and Founder of Bellyful:

- For people to want to do volunteer work, it has to connect with them at a deep level. Jacqui shares her story—of her experiences as a mother and why she started Bellyful as it motivates people to get involved. For most people who hear her story, something about it resonates with them and they want to contribute.
- Once there is a connection and a desire to volunteer, then it is important to quickly identify what makes them happy, what pushes their buttons, what they like doing and what they are good at so that the volunteer can be given a task that matches their strengths.
- Much of Bellyful’s success with volunteers is that volunteers get to experience first-hand the great results of their volunteer efforts. Delivering meals to families that are struggling, sleep-deprived or coping with a new baby, means that volunteers get the emotional connection to the people they are helping. Families are often so grateful for the meals. Jacqui says “It is a real warm fuzzy to be able to help someone else”.
- People often volunteer to fulfill their own desire to do good. Volunteers have their own motivating factors. It is important to understand what motivates them.
- Regarding retention: people stick with volunteering when they feel that they are really valued and needed. In the feedback from people who have left, one common reason is: ‘feeling like I’m not needed’. Another key reason is returning to full-time work. Bellyful’s volunteer demographic is mostly mothers of babies and young children.
- It is important to have a formula that is simple and easy to follow. Processes are streamlined and standardised throughout the organisation. Jacqui has written six handbooks for branches and there are three recipes for the meals. Bellyful has its suppliers organised centrally. Head office will take orders for what branches need in terms of supplies.
- Volunteers fill in a “Volunteer Profile” –it is like a volunteer agreement, but also asks for information about volunteers. The form asks for days and times available, asks lots of questions about working style e.g. “I see myself as a leader, I prefer to be given a task when cooking, I prefer to use my initiative, I like to be part of a team”. There are lots of questions as it is important to get a good idea of what individuals like to do, so that they can be appropriately matched to a task.
- Jacqui says “We really try to understand who our volunteers are and what they bring to the organisation”. Bellyful has conducted regular surveys, often about three in an 18-month period as they value getting feedback from volunteers.

### 1.3.2. Kaibosh

Kaibosh is New Zealand’s first dedicated food rescue organisation. It is based in Wellington and is about seven years old. Kaibosh rescues food from retailers that would otherwise be thrown away, and redistributes it to Wellington charities who work with people in need. ‘This is good for our community, good for the environment and good for businesses who work with sustainability and social justice values in mind.’ Kaibosh won the Trust Power Supreme Community Award in 2012 and is a great example of social entrepreneurship.

There are three main volunteer roles at Kaibosh:

Food Rescue: volunteers go out with paid drivers for 2 hours in the afternoon.

Food Sorting: volunteers work in teams to record information on food that comes in - they sort the good from the bad, weigh it, package it up into parcels for the charities to collect.

Market Rescue - volunteers go with paid drivers to the fresh produce markets on Saturday or Saturday and help them collect surplus produce from vendors. This shift runs for about 1.5 hours.

Kaibosh has a paid volunteer co-ordinator/manager who coordinates and engages about 85 volunteers. Kaibosh has a waiting list for volunteering as the programme is quite popular. Their volunteers range in age from 14 to late 60s. There are a lot of women in their 20s and 30s, some with kids and some without; also couples in their 30s, 40s or 50s who volunteer together.

Why is volunteering so successful at Kaibosh? Feedback from volunteers, included the following reasons:

- people liked that the volunteering had a very tangible result;
- relatively low commitment—once a fortnight, short shifts (1.5 hrs or 2 hrs);
- easy to fit in around work or study.

Learnings from Anoushka Isaac, Volunteer Co-ordinator:

- She sees her role as being “How to make their volunteering easy—so it’s not a chore to volunteer.”
- “Autonomy is really important for volunteers, but this needs to be combined with some structure”.
- Make sure volunteers have all the information they need: providing training to make sure volunteers know what they are meant to be doing and why, along with information on keeping themselves safe, especially as there can be some quite heavy lifting work.
- Place an emphasis on showing appreciation for volunteers: “because without them, this work would not get done!”
- Stay in touch with volunteers—monthly newsletter, ask volunteers for feedback and be open to volunteer feedback as volunteers will have ideas on what could be done better.
- Be responsive: “when volunteers provide feedback, we adjust to reflect their feedback”
- Volunteers at Kaibosh have provided feedback that they would like events that combine education with socialising. Education, by way of learning about the different organisations that Kaibosh provides food to, or learning about issues to do with social justice or sustainability.

### 1.3.3. Ronald McDonald House Wellington

Ronald McDonald House Wellington (RMH) has about 190 regular volunteers and their Volunteer Coordinator, Brent Taylor, says that they will “soon need a waiting list for volunteers”. Ronald McDonald House Wellington relies on the help of volunteers to keep the House running smoothly. There are many ways volunteers can be involved with various levels of commitment, from helping out once a month to



one day a week. Volunteers have the option to assist throughout the week or weekends. There are three main volunteer roles :

- House Volunteers: front of House/reception roles, helping out in the office with administration duties and any other jobs that may need doing, for example checking in a family, picking up groceries, sorting out storage cupboards and general tidying around the House or gardening.
- House Cooking Programme: involves groups of volunteers cooking meals in the House kitchen for families. This not only helps the families eat well, but also gives them more time to spend with their children. Volunteers bring ingredients with them. The House gets about 20 groups a month volunteering - including corporates, families and church groups. They cook an evening meal.
- Family Room Volunteers: There is a RMH Family Room within the Wellington Children's Hospital that is staffed by a roster of volunteers. This is a hostess/supervisor role. The volunteers get to interact with families as the Family Room is a place for families to escape the stresses of the hospital ward, relax, recharge, freshen up, have a snack or even do laundry - all while being only seconds from their child's bedside.

RMH Wellington receives approximately 2-3 unsolicited approaches a week, from people interested in volunteering for the House. Brent finds that they have really good people wanting to volunteer. Brent interviews each one and tells them exactly what the volunteer jobs involve. House volunteers and Family Room volunteers do a 4 hour stint once or twice a month, and many are on call also in case there is a cancellation.

The demographics of their volunteers include predominantly three groups: retired people, mothers with school aged-children and professionals (who do a weekend or evening shift). The age range of people who volunteer with RMH is 18-84 years old.

Brent Taylor, Volunteer Coordinator, believes that volunteering is successful at the Ronald McDonald House for the following reasons:

- A lot of it is to do with the profile of Ronald McDonald House. "People know what we do; our brand is strong".
- It is a small, discreet commitment of time - a four hour shift - once or twice a month.
- There's no administration work, paperwork, or committee meetings that the volunteers have to do. While some volunteers do help with administrative duties, that is because they want to, not because they have to.
- RMH is very clear about what it wants volunteers to do.
- What RMH asks volunteers to do is different from what the rest of the organisation does.
- The House and Family Room is a great environment to work in. Physically a great space; recently renovated.
- Paid staff at the House are friendly to volunteers. Brent sees that part of his role is to foster great attitudes to volunteers - he encourages paid staff to be friendly, smile, and thank volunteers lots. When a volunteer starts they are introduced to many of the paid staff.
- "Volunteers need to feel like they're a part of the organisation, be included".

- Recognising and valuing volunteers is key. RMH does this through:
  - Regular morning teas: inviting all volunteers to come, the CEO comes and thanks volunteers.
  - End of Year function: providing a meal for volunteers and giving them a gift. Thanking everyone for doing a wonderful job.
  - Keeping a database showing volunteer hours, so when volunteers reach 100 hours, they are presented with a thank you card to recognise this.
- The Volunteer Co-ordinator role is key - the person must be able to relate to all people, all age groups. They are the “one face all the volunteers know”.
- Understand that “volunteers have another life - your organisation is not their only interest”.
- RMH has an up-to-date and accurate volunteer database so they can say how many volunteers they have, and not just guess.
- The volunteering has to be a “win-win”.

### 1.3.4. Suzanne Aubert Compassion Centre/Soup Kitchen

What attracts volunteers to the Soup Kitchen? According to Nikki Burrows, Community Engagement Advisor<sup>7</sup>, “It’s hands-on, there’s no paperwork, and people have lots of client contact”. Approximately 150 people volunteer every month at the Suzanne Aubert Compassion Centre Soup Kitchen in Wellington. The Soup Kitchen actually has a waiting list of people who want to volunteer. There are no committees; most of the work offered is very practical. It is a “very straightforward option for volunteering”. There are two shifts—breakfast shift or dinner shift (each 1.5-2 hours long). People can volunteer once a week, once a fortnight or once a month. Once people start volunteering with the Soup Kitchen, it goes so well that there is very little drop-off in volunteers.

As the Community Engagement Advisor, Nikki was the one volunteer manager, working 30 hours a week and coordinating about 200 registered volunteers. Nikki knew all by name, their work background, and a bit about their family.

Learnings from Nikki at the Soup Kitchen:

- “People volunteering their time is more precious to us than goods or money.”
- “You’ve got to make sure the jobs are real, useful, practical, well-resourced, and there are robust and clear systems in place...The job should be one people want to do, and volunteers should be recognised as part of the organisation.”
- When people get in touch with the Soup Kitchen and say they would like to volunteer, Nikki sends them a form to fill in with their details and she tells them when training dates are.
- Then she sends them 2 documents: “Volunteer Introduction” and “Volunteer Job Description”.

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<sup>7</sup> Since the time of interviewing Nikki Burrows, she has left to take up a new position elsewhere.

- Then the person comes to a five-hour training session on a Saturday morning. The potential volunteers come in for breakfast with volunteers and clients - this forms the first part of the training session. The breakfast is well-monitored by staff and experienced volunteers. It gives prospective volunteers a feel for both the client group, and the actual volunteering roles available
- “We get amazing feedback on the training, people really enjoy it, and they enjoy most the history, values and mission content.”
- Make the training an active and interactive exercise. “If you ask the right questions when training, people will see that they already have the answers; it’s really empowering. The knowledge people gain from the training is much better retained if participants work out the answers themselves. It’s empowering, and more interesting than listening to a trainer talk for a long time.” Volunteers explore together what it might be like to be a Soup Kitchen client, how that might feel, and how they would like to be treated if they were coming in for a meal. “We are very mindful that we are talking about emotive issues, so take care to ensure a very comfortable and respectful environment.”
- To teach people about the Soup Kitchen’s values, volunteers are asked to work out attributes they think are desirable in Soup Kitchen volunteers, what these attributes ‘look like’ when you are performing them, and what the Soup Kitchen should do as a good ‘employer of volunteers’. All these ideas are sorted on a white board into the Soup Kitchen values. For example:  
Attribute: honesty  
What it looks like: letting us know if there’s something about volunteering that isn’t working for you,  
In which value does this attribute fit: *Honesty* fits under *Partnership*.  
This important exercise shows the volunteers how we all need to perform the values together— they are ‘active’ values.
- After the five-hour training session about the Soup Kitchen’s mission and values and working with the Soup Kitchen’s client group, people do not sign up to volunteer immediately, but are encouraged to go away and think about how the reality of Soup Kitchen volunteering fits with them, their other commitments and what they want to get out of volunteering.
- The Soup Kitchen’s ‘selection process’ is more about the person being able to ‘self-select out’. “If we are warm, welcoming but yet are very honest about the way we work, the reality of volunteer roles (the role is mainly about providing a meal service, and warm hospitality), then people who had different expectations decide not to continue.” Volunteers are asked to get in touch with the Community Engagement Advisor after the session to let her know whether or not they would like to volunteer. As there are so many people in the volunteer programme, Soup Kitchen volunteers are required to be very self-motivated. The request that the volunteer get in touch with the Soup Kitchen, (not the Soup Kitchen following up with the volunteer) is another way the staff can assess suitability for the role. “If someone isn’t motivated enough to let us know they’d like to continue with the process, they probably won’t be a good fit for our programme.”
- The next stage is a one-hour ‘orientation’ with the Community Engagement Advisor. At this orientation the volunteer is shown the practical and health and safety aspects of the job, and there’s a discussion about what the volunteer’s interests are, and what has drawn them to the role. Though like an interview, it is not called an ‘interview’ as some people find the idea of an interview very intimidating.”
- Due to the type of work involved in being a volunteer at the Soup Kitchen, there is a police check for potential volunteers.

- Volunteers and staff sign a “Partnership Form”- this is like a contract. It sets out what is expected of both sides. “We will be honest with you and need you to be honest with us.”
- There is progression in volunteering, volunteer teams are run by a Volunteer Team Leader at each shift. There’s a pre-shift brief and also a post-shift debrief, led by the Volunteer Team Leader.
- Nikki cited research showing that in a well-run volunteer programme for every one hour of paid staff time (by way of volunteer manager), the organisation gets four hours of volunteer time. Volunteer management is a specialised skill that is often undervalued and not well recognised.

### 1.3.5. Key themes from case studies

Three of the four NFPs examined above, share very similar attributes. For Kaibosh, Suzanne Aubert Compassion Centre/Soup Kitchen and Ronald McDonald House Wellington, some key factors for successful volunteering were:

- Short/discreet time commitment: the volunteers committed to doing short shifts, once a month/fortnight/week. This was seen as low-commitment, specific, and time-bound and easy to plan around for volunteers.
- High quality management of volunteers: the volunteer programmes at the three organisations were all managed by a skilled paid manager of volunteers.
- No committees, paperwork, administration or fundraising work for the volunteers.

While Bellyful differed from the other organisations by not having any paid volunteer managers, but involving committee work and fundraising, it still shared many key success factors with the other three organisations.

Factors leading to successful volunteering for all four organisations were:

- Real, practical, “hands on” work: the volunteer work at all four organisations was very practical and provided a direct correlation between actions and results. In the case of Bellyful, volunteers enjoyed delivering the meals to families that were sleep-deprived with a newborn or sick child. At the soup kitchen, volunteers provide warm hospitality and meals to soup kitchen clients.
- Very well organised and stream-lined processes: All four organisations shared similar attributes in having good systems in place for volunteer induction, training, orientation as well as the actual volunteer work. Bellyful, for example, focused on ensuring many processes are streamlined nationally.
- Great environment and culture to be in: there was a sense that people enjoyed working and volunteering at these organisations. It was social and fun; volunteers made a ‘difference’ and there was a sense of accomplishment in the work.

## 1.4. Key learnings from wider interviews

This section draws the key learnings from interviews with 18 NFPs, 12 experts in volunteerism, three social entrepreneurs. These learnings were:

- Volunteers need to be seen as a valuable asset and resource for NFPs;
- Great volunteer managers are like ‘gold’;
- It is important to ‘know your volunteers’;
- An organisation’s culture is a key determinant of success or failure with volunteers;
- Get clear about the mandate and role of volunteers;
- Volunteering and donating are strongly linked

This section will also look at some practical examples of innovation and best practice as well as look at the ‘basics’ for successful volunteering.

### 1.4.1. Volunteers are a valuable asset and resource

A key theme that came through from interviewees was a viewpoint or attitude about the value of volunteers. People saw that volunteers are the “most valuable asset” for any community sector organisation<sup>8</sup>/NFP. Volunteers need to be recognised as extremely valuable and valued for more than the time they give. Why?

- Volunteers are the best ambassadors for any NFP. Investing in ensuring volunteers are happy with your organisation, is an investment that has huge returns. Volunteers are your voice into the wider community.
- Volunteers will “halve your marketing budget if you have them successfully engaged”.

*“You can spend millions on a marketing campaign, but it won’t talk to friends at a coffee group about you...or talk to her elderly mother about leaving a bequest”<sup>9</sup>*

- Volunteers are an asset and should be treated with utmost care and respect.  
*“They are an asset. If you don’t manage them as an asset they will quickly become a liability”.*

### 1.4.2. Great managers of volunteers are ‘gold’

If you have a volunteer programme, you must have the right person in the Volunteer Manager role. Managing volunteers requires a complex skill set. It was raised by several interviewees that “managing volunteers is much harder than managing paid staff”. The person who works directly with volunteers must be “fantastic”. Generally, the manager or leader of volunteers:

- Is a ‘people person’, so will remember people’s names, know everyone who volunteers, a bit about their lives, and connects with them on a personal level. Generally they are someone likeable! He/she must be interested in people, and have a positive attitude towards volunteers.
- Is also an enthusiastic volunteer themselves. They have volunteered before and/or volunteer currently.
- Really “gets volunteers” - meaning that the Volunteer Manager understands what it is like for volunteers; understands that there are other demands on the person’s time; understands what motivates the person to volunteer. Great volunteer managers have great empathy.
- Values volunteering - is a great advocate and champion of the value of volunteering for their organisation, and for society.
- Will focus on making volunteering easy for you. “You’ve got to make it easy to volunteer.”

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<sup>8</sup> In this section I have struggled with what to call these social-purpose driven organisations. Do I call it community organisations, community-based organisations, not-for-profits (NFPs), or non profits, or NGO? I’ve used the short hand of NFP in most cases but I recognise its limitations as a ‘term of convenience’..

<sup>9</sup> Quotes in this paper are from interviewees. Some interviewees chose to be anonymous, while others were happy to be quoted. But for the purposes of this paper, all quotes are not attributed.

- Advocates for the volunteers and promotes a positive culture for volunteers. For example, one volunteer manager said that when they hear staff speaking about a negative incident with a volunteer, they are quick to address it and get to the bottom of it. Another volunteer manager explained that they ‘trained paid staff on how to be enthusiastic about and inclusive of volunteers’.
- Understands that “volunteer management is all about relationship management”.

### 1.4.3. Know your volunteers

Organisations with successful volunteering generally had a paid volunteer manager who knew nearly all the volunteers personally. Great examples were Kaibosh, Ronald McDonald House, and Suzanne Aubert Compassion Centre as discussed in the last section. Furthermore, Te Omanga Hospice and Cancer Society Wellington also emphasised the importance of knowing the volunteers. It was more than ‘names to faces’. It was also important to know their background and personal circumstances, for example if they had a sick grandchild or sudden death in the family.

Larger nation-wide organisations also emphasised knowing the volunteers:

- You need to understand the demographic of your volunteer pool, this will help to understand how people want to volunteer, what skills they have to offer, what they want to get out of volunteering. Ask how do people use their time – are they on other committees? What other organisations do they commit to? What good community connections and networks do they have?
- Survey your volunteers - find out what they think. The organisations that were successful with volunteers sought volunteers’ feedback and acted upon it.

Whether large or small, knowing your volunteers also enables an NFP to capitalise on what would otherwise be a missed opportunity. For example, Cancer Society Wellington has a “Volunteer Archivist” role because when a woman came, offering to volunteer, together the Volunteer Manager and the woman figured out that that the Cancer Society could benefit from her archival skills. There are countless examples of this happening when time was taken to learn about the volunteer and a match was found between what the volunteer can do and what the organisation needs.

### 1.4.4. An organisation’s culture is key

An NFP’s culture is a key determinant of success or failure with volunteers. It is not what you say your values are, not what is written down about your values, but actually how people (both paid staff and volunteers) in the organisation behave, think, and act. This makes up your organisational culture.

- Organisational culture and the mentality an organisation has about volunteers is often the key to success or failure with volunteers.
- Organisations that are successful at involving volunteers, have a good culture that values and includes volunteers. It is part of the ethos of the whole organisation. There is mutual respect and trust between volunteers and paid staff.
- Paid staff appreciate volunteers, see volunteers as integral and say ‘thank you’ a lot!
- Volunteers feel that they are a well-connected part of the organisation.
- A culture that involves trust and respect allows volunteerism to flourish. For there to be respect and trust people must know each other and communicate with each other.

### 1.4.5. Mandate and role clarity for volunteering

While communication, engagement, management and resourcing for volunteering is important, what is even more important is clarity about mandate and purpose.

- For a volunteer programme to be successful, it needs to have a clear purpose. It should also be something that is different from what the rest of the organisation's paid staff members do.
- Role clarity is key. For many volunteers, well-defined tasks, roles and functions are necessary. For other volunteers, they prefer to have a role or function, but to have greater autonomy on how they complete tasks or achieve objectives.

### 1.4.6. Volunteering and donating are strongly linked

Volunteer management and donor management should be more integrated. Organisations that had done their research found that their volunteers were key, regular donors. Furthermore, the volunteers also generated other donors through their friendship and family networks.

- Volunteering is about giving in time, not in cash. Fundraising is about the generation of support—in cash and time. Therefore, volunteers should be seen as key donors to the organisation and treated as such.
- NFPs readily “invest money in order to raise money”. Fundraising is a respected profession and highly sought-after skill in the NFP sector. ‘Volunteer-raising’ should be treated similarly. NFPs need to “invest money and time, in order to get time”.

### 1.4.7. Some great examples of innovation/best practice

There were some fantastic examples of great work from many NFPs. A few examples that others can copy and duplicate:

- Online nationally-developed orientation for Daffodil Day volunteers:  
The Cancer Society developed a strategy to ‘induct’ informal volunteers, especially targeted for the hundreds of people who collect for the Society on its annual appeal day. The informal volunteers are not required to come to a set ‘training session’ but they can do it at their convenience online at the Cancer Society’s webpage. It is a PowerPoint slideshow with a quiz to recap at the end. It takes 15 minutes overall.
  - See: <http://www.cancernz.org.nz/assets/storyline/daffodilday/story.html>
- “Volunteer History Project” by the Cancer Society Wellington. This is an example of how to showcase your volunteers as well as being a form of volunteer recognition. Volunteer interviewers interview other volunteers and write a profile about the person. This profile is presented back to the volunteer by the CEO.
- Inspire volunteers, paid staff and the public with stories: Have a monthly internet story of what volunteers are doing. Publicise it to paid staff within the organisation, publicise it to the public. “Often amazing stuff is happening but people do not even know about it...Create life-changing opportunities for volunteers, they will want to volunteer.”

### 1.4.8. Some basics for volunteering success

Some other practical “best practice” that is essential for involving volunteers successfully:

- Key documents: organisations that work really well with volunteers tend to have these documents:

- Code of Conduct/Partnership Form/Contract: It is important to have a joint document for the NFP and the Volunteer. It should be a joint document between equals. It should include information about reimbursing expenses; the volunteer’s right to resign; training and clear information about expectations and guidelines; the organisation’s right to ask the volunteer to leave when things are no longer working. Include ‘this is what you can expect of us and this is what we can expect of you’.
- Job Descriptions for various volunteer roles.
- A budget to ensure training, support and resources and to reimburse volunteers for reasonable expenses
- Recognition and appreciation of volunteers must be built into the business model and funding must be allocated for functions, certificates, etc.
- A Database for keeping records of volunteers and volunteering. It is interesting to see how different NFPs are approaching this. Some seek to integrate volunteers on the HR system with paid staff; some use the same database for volunteers and donors; some are heading towards exploring social media type programmes which are user-driven (i.e. volunteer-driven) for volunteers to network with each other.
- A volunteer-friendly website very clear on different ways volunteers can be involved, roles are described clearly and there are “Meet the Volunteers” stories.
  - See for example: Kaibosh, Home of Compassion Soup Kitchen, Greenpeace and St John New Zealand

### 1.4.9. The ‘intangible stuff’

Section 1.4.4. talks about the importance of an organisation’s culture. The ‘intangible stuff’ is very important to volunteering and can not be underestimated. People come back to volunteering again and again for two reasons:

- They like the staff, the volunteer manager, the other volunteers.
- The cause is one they believe in and they are engaged in what the organisation is trying to achieve.

One interviewee also explained that there are generally two questions people have when they are thinking of volunteering:

- Will I be useful?
- Will I make friends?

People want to know they will be useful. People are also a bit apprehensive to volunteer if they do not know anyone else on the ‘committee’ or involved in the organisation. You must have a strategy for bringing people in from ‘being supporters’ to being a volunteer.

### 1.4.9. The next generation?

Younger people and the next generation will be doing ‘volunteering’ differently. Young social entrepreneurs and change-makers, such as those interviewed from Generation Zero, Enspiral and others, do not even see themselves as ‘volunteering’. The line between what is paid work and unpaid work is blurred for social entrepreneurs and young change-maker volunteers. Furthermore, when they cannot find an organisation that engages them, younger people will find or create their own solutions. Therefore many new organisations have emerged for people to give their time and energy to. Key learnings:



- Generation X, Generation Y and the Millennial Generation have different expectations of volunteering from Baby Boomers.
- Younger people are more likely to vote with their feet. They choose how they give their time and who they give their time to. If they are not getting “value for their time”, they will go elsewhere.

## 1.5. Key learnings: common challenges

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Several themes came through in terms of common challenges in the NFP sector with regard to volunteerism. Many interviewees felt that more commitment was needed from ‘the top’, especially towards greater recognition for managers and leaders of volunteers.

### 1.5.1. Commitment is needed from ‘the top’

For an organisation to be successful at involving volunteers – there must be commitment from the top. The CEO, the Board and the Senior Management Team, must believe in the value of volunteers and see that the organisation needs volunteers. This commitment must be real and strong:

- Saying ‘we really value volunteers’ is not enough—this is likely to be seen as lip service. Leaders should be asking themselves— “How are we demonstrating that value?”
- If volunteers are truly valued, the organisation must find the money and resources to commit to:
  - engagement with volunteers;
  - communication with volunteers;
  - building relationships and trust with volunteers;
  - knowing who the volunteers are;
  - volunteer programme(s);
  - ensure quality management of volunteers through well-paid and skilled volunteer managers.

### 1.5.2. Large national NFPs and volunteers

There was acknowledgement that for many larger NFPs, volunteers were sometimes problematic. There was a sense that some organisations, while built by volunteers, over time had ‘outgrown’ their need for these volunteers. This was often problematic and resulted in ‘power struggles’. Some learnings in relation to this:

- When an NFP engages with volunteers the entire organisation needs to understand what this really means - it is not the task of one person. It must be understood by the board, the CEO, and all the way through the organisation. It needs to be part of the ethos and the values of the organisation. “If done properly it will be your greatest asset. Done badly it will be your greatest hurdle. Don’t leave it to one person.”
- All senior managers in NFPs should understand the importance of volunteers and understand volunteering. It should be a part of their core competencies. “In terms of organizational values, unless everyone lives it and breathes it, it will not happen.”
- When paid staff are disconnected from their volunteers, they often see volunteers as a bit of a nuisance, a barrier to getting work done and ‘a bit of a burden’. To avoid this, there needs to be more interaction between paid staff and volunteers.

- For NFP organisations with paid staff and a ‘head office’, it is vital that staff know the volunteers (or at least some volunteers) and volunteers know the key staff and who does what.
- Most of the time volunteers have not been heard. One practical solution: send out a survey and ask ‘why do you volunteer? What do you want to do? What skills can you offer? What skills would you like to develop? What worked for you when you volunteered- what didn’t? Listen and act on it.
- Take time to build the relationships.
- Have someone at National office responsible for volunteering. The word ‘volunteer’ must be in their job title. One interviewee said:
 

“If volunteering is so important to your organisation it should be acknowledged as such (with a person with a job title that includes ‘volunteer’). That person should have a decent salary and work directly with senior management. This says to your volunteers that ‘We value you and we’ve employed someone to champion you and your interests’”.
- If you want to instill the value of volunteering in the organisation, staff should be encouraged and supported to volunteer themselves. “Walk the talk”.

### 1.5.3. Greater recognition and investment needed into Volunteer Managers

Not-for-profit organisations need to invest in paid volunteer managers and recognise that it is a specialist skill-set. NFPs should put more funding into volunteer managers’ professional development and fund them to attend conferences or workshops and provide them with time to network with other volunteer managers. Key learnings:

- Many volunteer managers interviewed felt they were the least resourced unit in their organisation.
- The current standard of pay for volunteer managers is too low. One interviewee cited research that it is between \$18-\$30 per hour in New Zealand. This rate of pay does not reflect the complex skill set required of good volunteer managers.
- More people, especially NFP leaders and CEOs, need to recognise that volunteer management is a highly skilled job. As a profession it urgently needs greater monetary recognition.

### 1.5.4. Community development vs structured volunteer programmes

Community development work is really hard to do ‘nationally’ and by large organisations. Community development work *is* volunteering, but it is not structured formal volunteering via a volunteer programme. Community development work is usually led by a local volunteer. Key learnings:

- Community development work is really hard to do ‘nationally’ and by large organisations. By its nature, community development is local and ‘grass-roots’.
- There is a real tension between large national organisations and community development. Often this tension is not spoken of. Large national organisations work hard on their credibility and brand, and there are risks of that brand being ‘muddied’ by what individuals may choose to do. However, community development work requires the freedom and autonomy to be community-led, not nationally directed. This is where the tension lies.
- One potential role for national organisations, would be providing ‘establishment grants’ for small local groups to get started, and support them in terms of training and investment. However, an NFP should know what type of thing that it wants volunteers to do. The organisation must design

and support something, but with the understanding that it will not be the same everywhere. There's no 'one size fits all' in community development.

- If a large NFP wants to have a role in community development work, the NFP should give people something to be loyal to. As one interviewee said: *"If you want voluntary leaders to lead community development, you've got to find them and develop them. Invest in a leadership programme, for example."*

### 1.5.5. Death of 'committees'?

Several interviewees spoke about how many people are put off by the word 'committee'. "Committees" were seen as a 'dreadful drain on time' as the voluntary commitment was endless, undefined and also likely to be marred by politics or personality dynamics in a group. There was a trend towards people wanting more practical things to do with tangible outcomes and immediate results. Some learnings:

- The Blind Foundation has volunteer groups throughout the country called 'community committees' who provide local social support and help support the services the organisation provides. In recent years, it became more difficult to recruit volunteers to serve on these committees. To address this 'local support groups' have been initiated with more emphasis on organising group activities and peer support for local people who are blind or have low vision. These groups do not have a formal committee structure but rather a coordinator, note-taker and treasurer.
- While the word committee may go out of favour, it is still largely the means used to organise groups of people and especially in the community development space.

## 1.6 Conclusion

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In conclusion, while some organisations struggle to retain volunteers, some organisations have waiting lists for volunteering and are growing their volunteer numbers. This shows that a certain 'type' of volunteering is in greater demand, while other 'types' are in less demand. The four case studies of organisations where volunteering is flourishing show that volunteers are after volunteer work that is more discreet and time-bound; and with direct practical outcomes. Very well organised and managed volunteer programmes are also a key factor. The absence of committees, paperwork and fundraising at three of the four case studies is also seen as attractive by volunteers.

Several other best practice themes and key learnings also emerged from the wider interviews with over 30 organisations and experts. Importantly, it emerged that NFPs need to see volunteers more broadly - as an asset and a resource. Volunteers are ambassadors for an NFP. When successfully engaged, they are a powerful force. Highly skilled and well-resourced management of volunteers is also crucial, and an organisation's culture is a major underlying determinant of success or failure with volunteers.

There are many common challenges in the NFP sector in the area of volunteerism. Many interviewees cited that commitment is needed from 'the top' to the importance of volunteers. There is a sense that volunteer managers are very under-resourced, under-valued and unrecognised for the complex and hard work they do. Greater investment and recognition is needed in this area. Both larger and smaller NFPs

share these challenges. Larger NFPs also seem to face another challenge in terms of disconnection or conflict with their traditional or long-term volunteer base and problematic “power struggles”.

Overall, volunteering is alive and well, and growing in some pockets of the Third Sector, but there are certainly areas where volunteering is dying quietly. People are less inclined to volunteer for a ‘committee’ and more inclined to volunteer to do something specific, hands-on and with tangible results. The key lesson to be learned, that can be applied anywhere in the Third Sector, is to be sure that the activity or work that you are asking volunteers to do, makes a difference. After all, what the Third Sector has always been about and will be about, is making a positive difference to our world. And that is what volunteers want to do, too.

## Appendix A: People/Organisations consulted

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### **Not for Profits (NFPs) (20 people, 18 organisations)**

Bellyful New Zealand—Jacqui Ritchie, Executive Director and Founder  
Blind Foundation—Alison Marshall, National Manager Volunteer Services / Locality Co-ordinator  
Cancer Society—Ann Hodson, Manager Volunteers, Wellington  
Generation Zero—Lucinda Staniland and Jack Tolley,  
Great Start Taita—Kirsten Grenfell, Manager, Jeanette Higham, Early Years Manager  
Greenpeace— Michael Tritt, Director of Fundraising  
IHC—Adele Blackwood, National Fundraising Manager  
Kaibosh—Anoushka Isaac, Volunteer Co-ordinator  
Manurewa Parenting Hub—Linda Biggs, Manager  
Mother’s Network Wellington—Ruth Holt  
Parents Centre—Joan Hay, Centre Operations Manager  
Ronald McDonald House Wellington—Brent Taylor, Volunteer Co-ordinator  
St John New Zealand—David Rowland, St John Central Volunteer Support Manager (Operations)  
& Sonya Gale, St John NZ, Head of Community Programmes and Engagement  
Save The Children—Kay Enoka, Manager Community Engagement  
Leah Carr, National Board Member, and Change Management Consultant  
Surf Life Saving New Zealand—Paul Dalton., Chief Executive  
Suzanne Aubert Compassion Centre—Nikki Burrows, (former) Community Engagement Advisor  
Te Omanga Hospice—Janice Henson, Manager of Volunteer Services  
VSA (Volunteer Service Abroad)—Carolyn Mark, Volunteer Recruitment Manager

### **Academics/specialists/experts in volunteerism (12 people)**

Natalie Clark, VolunteerNet Project Advisor, Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment  
Megan Courtney, Inspiring Communities Trust  
Lani Evans, (former) National Convenor, ReGeneration Trust  
Pauline Harper and Julie Thompson, Co-Managers, Volunteer Wellington  
Kitty Hilton, Chief Executive, Nikau Foundation and Independent Fundraising Consultant  
Sue Hine, Independent Volunteer Advocate  
Heidi Quinn, Department of Conservation  
Tina Reid, (former) Executive Director, Social Development Partners

Karen Smith, Associate Professor, Victoria University Wellington

Claire Teal, (former) Programme Manager, Volunteering NZ

Kate Timlin, Senior Policy Analyst, Civil Society and Information Directorate, Department of Internal Affairs

**Social Enterprise (3 people)**

Silvia Zuur, Chalkle

Rohan Wakefield, Enspiral, Wellington

Danny Spiers, Wikihouse NZ Lab

## Appendix B: Reference List

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(Note this reference list is for the wider report produced for Plunket. It has been reproduced here as some of the material may be of interest to people reading this report).

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## Web Resources

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