

To very quickly summarize; the Student Volunteer Army or SVA as we call it, is a student led club, with over 3,000 members, at the University of Canterbury. It was founded after the earthquakes in 2010 and 2011 and has since become a large part of the university culture and daily life of 30 executive members. Within this team we work to provide volunteering opportunities every weekend of the university years ranging in size from 5 to 1,000 people. While also running a high school programme and continuing our involvement within the online and offline community. We do what we do simply because we love it. We want to help, and we want to break those traditional boundaries and expectations of students and play our part in giving back to the Christchurch community. While today we have made the move from being a solely disaster response and clean up group to a fully-fledged volunteer organisation, we still withhold those same values and want to mobilise and empower students to help their communities in any means necessary.

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Another question that Ali asked me to touch on was “why people volunteer”. You will all have a different answer to this but from the many people I have spoken to, the most common answers seem to be because it is enjoyable, it gives you an opportunity to have an active role in your community, you get to help those in need, it is social and gives you an opportunity to connect with people you wouldn’t normally work with and that it fosters a spirit of service and giving which anyone can give or receive. I completely agree with these answers and I guess for me the reason I volunteer is a mix of the ability to help those in need but also the connections you make through volunteering. All of my closest friends outside of uni and my mentors I have met through volunteering of some sort. Take right now for instance, if it weren’t for volunteering most of us probably wouldn’t be in this room right now, it plays a significant role in each of our lives so we all must have a pretty decent reason why we each volunteer.

Moving on from talking about me, I want to touch on how the student volunteer army relates to the two statements Olivia mentioned earlier. The first statement “to be involved, we need to care”. The main idea behind this statement I believe is that be involved in something we need to care, but to care about something we need to know about it, connect with it and engage with it. The Student Volunteer Army focuses on providing opportunities to students which will allow them to learn about and engage with issues which they wouldn’t normally engage with. We provide projects each weekend which promote students to evacuate their daily bubble and recognise what is going on outside of the university campus or even the Riccarton/Ilam community. By providing them with these opportunities the hope is that these students will discover the issue and realise why they should care about it. The aim then being that they will leave our event with a new found level of care for the issue at hand and will continue to interact with similar issues in the future. One example of this I can think of is from the first camp we had this year. We travelled down to Twizel and completed a project where we removed wilding pines alongside DOC and the council. Before going down there the majority of our volunteer didn’t know the difference between pines and wilding pines and why they were such a big issue. However, by the end of the project they were very much engaged with the removal of the pests and were asking heaps of questions on the issue. This is an example of how showing people why something is an issue is the first step in getting them to care and then be involved in something.

The second statement is that “I’m making a difference when I volunteer”. I think I can speak for all of us in saying that this statement is correct. When we volunteer we are making a difference, whether that be putting a smile on a little kids face when giving them some shoes or doing riparian planting to help protect our waterways, we all know that when we volunteer we are making a difference whether that be big or small. I think I can also say that every single person, regardless of who they

are, want to make a difference in the world in one way or another, however, the opportunities to do so aren't always available. For example, in the daily life of a full-time student there aren't many opportunities to go and make a difference, and when there is, there also seems to be some sort of thing in the way. Maybe the student can't get there, or you have to pay to be a part of the event or maybe something as simple as not being able to heat up their 2-minute noodles for lunch at the event so they will go hungry if they go. This is where SVA steps in. SVA aims to provide students with these opportunities to make a small difference without any of the potential barriers, while also adding in plenty of reasons why people would want to go. For example, all our events are free, and we provide free transport and free food. For our large, special events we get a band to come along afterwards and have games to add a social and fun aspect to the event afterwards. The benefits of these being that it gives people incentive to come out and make a difference and they have little to no reason why they shouldn't. Then by actually turning up and doing the work they see and experience the benefits within the community and themselves and recognise the difference they are able to make physically, emotionally, socially and spiritually within the community.

Sam Johnson believes that if we provide our volunteers with just one super positive volunteering experience then we set them up for a lifetime of volunteering. This is the overall aim of the SVA and how we aim to plan our events to ensure that our volunteers not only have a good day but continue to volunteer and make a difference for the rest of their lives.