

## WHY VOLUNTEER

At Volunteering Canterbury we have 250-300 people each month register with us to find out more about volunteering. It's in the genes of our society – no ad campaigns, no fancy incentives, no pressure. They seek us out to find out more. Volunteering remains a consistent activity of NZers – so why is that.

It may be well be in our genes, but there are some current trends which create challenges – and in this short time I will touch on just a few, the first one of which relates particularly to our region as it directly reflects our changing demographics.

### Trend One

25-27% of the registrations I referred to earlier identify as having English as a second language. Canterbury is a region of change – with particular growth in Filipino, Irish and Indian populations along with our own people, 1000 people identifying as Ngai Tahu moving here post-quake.

For those people – making connections through volunteering is a 'given' – and that's very often their 'why'.

### Trend Two

Older people are staying in paid employment longer or retiring to caregiver roles with their children's children – a reflection of today's lifestyles, costs of living etc. That means there's not the time that previous generations had to gift back to the wider community. There's also a growing shift to retirement village living – so volunteering for 'connections', may not in that environment be the valid 'why' that it is for those living on their own, and we know that social isolation is widespread amongst our elder folk. Home ownership is not the 'given' for many of these people as it had been in this country's past – and as our population ages, so too will the number of older people renting, and how that affects their take-up of volunteer roles remains to be seen. With a fixed income, this demographic may also look to volunteer close to home, thereby not incurring costs associated with travel.

### Trend Three

People want to be asked to volunteer. A recent Volunteering NZ Survey, one of the highest ranking reasons for not volunteering, people said, was 'no one has asked me'. We know that our newcomers need to be asked when they come from cultures where volunteering isn't as intrinsic as it is here. And our young people also want to be asked. What harm can it do to ask? We do it all the time in other areas – would you like to take a holiday in Rarotonga? Would you like to make that small coffee a large? Perhaps it is because we field so many of these questions on a day to day basis that we are starting to need to be asked now to volunteer?

#### Trend Four

People don't want to join your organisation's volunteer team for life. Just as these days people can have many job and career changes, they want to spread themselves around in the unpaid work they do as well. While a few generations ago, people went into a career and stayed for life (often in the same job within that career field), that is not the case today. Our younger volunteers coming through want their volunteer experience to be a finite one – with a beginning and an end. And while training and inductions are time-consuming and sometimes costly and I appreciate that impacts on your volunteer programmes, you need to get over it. Don't ask what the volunteer can do for your organisation, ask instead what you can do for the volunteer. Treat your volunteers as clients – and look after them, establish what they are looking for from their volunteer experience and aim to fill that. And, yes, get used to a turnover in volunteer staff that reflects what is happening in the paid workforce. No one sits still any more.

#### Trend Five

People want to make an impact. They don't gift their time because it is 'spare' – they gift it to make a difference.

These are trends of challenge when it comes to volunteer management.

I believe, however, that the biggest challenge remains that in NZ where we have 114,000 not-for-profits, and only 10% of staff in those not-for-profits are paid, we need a lot of volunteers. And YOUR organisation is competing with 113,999 others for those volunteers.

So why volunteer for YOUR ORGANISATION?

And please don't say because you are doing great things in the community. Because you are not alone in that.

The volunteer experience needs to be worthwhile and satisfying. I need to know what I'm doing and why. And when I'm 'done' I need to feel at the least warm fuzzies – and at the best, understand the difference I have made. The impact. I want a reassurance for what I know already, that it's good to do good.

We all want to make an impact. So what is the impact of your organisation? Do you plant 25,000 natives each planting season? That's great. But what's the impact? The impact is a greener planet for future generations ... you need to tell that story. And if you tell your story well, your volunteers (who as well as doing the tasks they are set are also all ambassadors of your organisation) will tell it well too.

At Volunteering Canterbury we identify our group volunteering projects against the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. I am a huge fan of the UNSDGs, possibly because many years ago I spent four years at the NZ Mission to the UN in New York, and I am in awe of the ability of the 193 UN member states to unanimously adopt, in 2016, such a set of Goals.

The UNSDGs mean that when you tell your story, you can put it in a global context. When you plant 25,000 natives, you create a recreational spot for future generations to enjoy ... and you contribute to UNSDG 15 'Life on Land', UNSDG 13 'Climate Action' and, I would suggest, UNSDG 3 Good Health and Wellbeing. How cool is that that here in Christchurch, situated at latitude longitude co-ordinates, 43.5321° S, 172.6362°E, a volunteer can make a difference at that spot AND ALSO identify with a project which is bigger than the reserve they are in, bigger than the provincial district they inhabit .... Making a contribution to one of 17 goals which are aimed at transforming our world. And its measurable ... google the UNSDGs – check out the global indicators that enable governments to monitor and review the 169 targets that have been identified and sit under these 17 goals ...

This is the big picture stuff – the WHY! And that's the story you need to tell.

WHY do people volunteer? Because their parents did, because it's the thing to do, because it's something that they like doing or want to try.

But that's not THE why you should be asking. You should be asking Why do people volunteer for your organisation – or, if you put it another way, why are people volunteering for another organisation and not yours. And that's the WHY you need to answer. And that's the story you need to tell – because it is that story, your story, that sets your organisation apart from the other 113,999.