2011 is the tenth anniversary of the international year of volunteering. Ten years ago, the United Nations declared 2001 to be the international year of volunteering and this had a strong impact on enhancing volunteering in developed and developing countries. In 2011 the UN will commemorate the 10 year anniversary by publishing the World State of Volunteering. As such, it is appropriate that the first Knowledge Connect in 2011 is dedicated to volunteering.

As Prof. Ram Cnaan writes in his book review here, 20 years ago literature on volunteering was narrow enough for one person to read. Nowadays, it is an impossible task to read it all. With several academic journals dedicated to the subject, numerous books and websites, the available knowledge is quite broad. This is all part of the professionalisation process of volunteer management. Cnaan’s review is of a book that, although not recent, is the most thorough coverage of research on volunteering.

Volunteering is an activity which has many stakeholders involved: the volunteers, the not-for-profits (NFPs) and their employees, the recipients, and others. Rogelberg discusses volunteering from the NFPs employee’s perceptive, while Lee looks at corporate volunteering from the NFPs angle. Further, the volunteer’s family and community are also important players, as explained by Cowlishaw. The government is another stakeholder, and the article by Pick describes the impact of State and Federal governments on volunteering in WA. Finally, for volunteering to be ethical and socially inclusive, some measures need to be taken, as discussed by Miller.

Links are provided to the full articles so you can investigate those that interest you. On the Knowledge Connect website I have included editorial comments on some articles. We encourage you to add your comments to the site, as well as ideas for future issues.

Dr Debbie Haski-Leventhal
Guest Editor, Knowledge Connect
1. Corporate volunteering: Considering multiple stakeholders

By Louise Lee. Third Sector Review, 2010

Corporate volunteering is one of the fastest-growing areas of voluntary activity in the Western World as it is considered a win-win-win for the three main players: the company, employees and not-for-profit organisations (NFPs). However, there is little research evidence to support that assumption from the NFPs perspective.

Lee conducted qualitative research among New Zealand companies and NFPs to discover their perceptions about the benefits and challenges of corporate volunteering. She found that there were several benefits of corporate volunteering perceived by NFPs: having the ‘people power’ to accomplish general tasks or projects that wouldn’t otherwise necessarily get done; broadening networks and gaining greater exposure to the business world; educating business on social issues and raising awareness of the work of NFPs; and developing business–NFP partnerships that might include other elements of support such as financial donations, in-kind products or services, staff donations or marketing initiatives.

However, NFPs also revealed the many challenges involved in corporate volunteering. Many found it difficult to provide suitable volunteering roles. While many NFPs wanted more committed volunteers to help with their core mission and a greater focus on skills-based volunteering, the overwhelming majority of corporate volunteers in this study were involved in activities that utilised general skills rather than professional expertise.

Finding suitable volunteering roles that fit within the short timeframes of one-day projects and yet were still meaningful for the NFP, the volunteers and the business presented significant challenges for NFP managers. The one-day team-volunteering model, the model most often offered to them, didn’t meet the most pressing volunteer needs of their organisations. Further, the hidden costs of hosting corporate volunteers (financial and non-financial) put further strain on stretched NFP resources. Inadequate communication and information-sharing between the business and NFP was another issue and some businesses had high and unrealistic expectations of what NFPs could offer through corporate volunteering projects.

To read the full article see: [http://www.anztsr.org.au/pubns.htm](http://www.anztsr.org.au/pubns.htm)

2. Big-Hearted Blue

The Economist, October 2010

IBM managed to address some of the challenges involved with corporate volunteering by creating an international volunteering program - the IBM Corporate Service Corps. Teams work pro bono with municipalities and governments in the developing world to help develop new strategies in areas ranging from public transport and water supply to food safety and innovation. Launched in 2007 as a “corporate version of the Peace Corps”, the program is now being scaled up to 500 IBM employees a year while more than 10,000 have applied to take part in it so far. As described in the Economist, recipient communities benefit from an influx of talented problem-solvers, the company’s brand is polished and it gets a squadron of leaders with new skills, while it also increases the commitment of participating employees to IBM.

According to IBM, the biggest challenge has been to ensure that the corps is actually benefiting those it claims to help, especially as the missions last only four weeks for staff and three weeks for executives.

To read the full article see: [http://www.economist.com/node/17366147](http://www.economist.com/node/17366147)

3. Inclusive Volunteering: Community and Family Perspectives

By Kimberly Miller, Pam Scoglio and Stuart Schleien, International Journal of Volunteer Administration, July 2010

While volunteering has many advantages for the not-for-profit (NFP) sector, community and the volunteers themselves, it may emphasise social divides, as volunteers are typically people with higher income, higher education and social resources providing support for those in need. It is important to acknowledge the social risks involved and strive for inclusive volunteering.

As Miller and her colleagues explain, inclusive volunteering seeks to capture and capitalise on the contribution that comes from those in our community who are rarely viewed as assets and it represents a potent strategy for building the capacity of individuals, NFPs and the community. In particular, the authors discuss the inclusion of people with
diverse abilities, not just as recipients of services but also as providers.

Volunteering can offer individuals with disabilities myriad benefits such as raised levels of maturity and responsibility, improved socialisation, relationship skills and development of social networks, increased sensitivity to the needs of others, increased self-confidence, a sense of empowerment and vocational skills development. However, there are some challenges involved in including such volunteers: negative attitudes among staff and consumers, inaccessible settings, and perceived skill deficits of individuals with disabilities. The authors cite studies showing that more than two-thirds of volunteer managers who engaged volunteers with disabilities believed the resulting benefits far outweighed the barriers.

Based on a community initiative in the US to include persons with diverse abilities as volunteers, the authors offer six suggestions on how to increase the likelihood of success of inclusive volunteering. These suggestions include: reaching out proactively to individuals with disabilities and the agencies that serve them to offer them volunteering opportunities; taking a positive asset-based approach; making a careful match between individuals’ strengths and agencies’ needs; and providing disability awareness and etiquette training to staff and volunteers.

To read the full article:

Editor’s note
Further information about involving volunteers with a disability can be found in guidelines from Volunteering Australia:
http://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/html/i02_article/article_view.asp?id=2303&nav_cat_id=255&nav_top_id=57

4. Balance between volunteer work and family roles: Testing a theoretical model of work-family conflict in the volunteer emergency services


The discussion of work-family conflict has gained popularity in the last two decades, and in this interesting article the authors apply it in the volunteering context, in particular to emergency service volunteers. Although proportionally small in relation to the total number of volunteers, emergency services volunteers make an important contribution by protecting life, property, and the environment, most in fire fighter positions. According to this article, total volunteer-based fire agency membership declined in Australia by approximately 30% from 1995 to 2003, for many reasons including economic, demographic and organisational ones.

In this study the authors examine the factors leading to work-family conflict among 102 couples in which one was a volunteer fire-fighter in Australia. They found that the level of emotional involvement of the fire-fighter, post-traumatic syndrome symptoms and time investment (having to volunteer many hours in the fire season, being on call and time invested in training) all led to higher levels of conflict. Work-family conflict then led to volunteer burnout and lack of support by partners.

To read the full article:
http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/content~content=a925993832~db=all~jumptype=rss
5. Employee experiences with volunteers

By Steven G. Rogelberg and others, Nonprofit Management & Leadership, Summer 2010

Although one may think that employees in not-for-profits (NFPs) would always be happy to have volunteers in their organisations, we know that sometimes the working relationship between the NFP employees and volunteers can be challenging for several reasons, and when it does not work well, it can have a negative impact on the volunteers, the employees, the organisational leadership and the organisation.

In this article the authors examine the ways employees in animal care organisations perceive and describe volunteers, and what variables may be related to positive or negative perceptions. The first part of the study examined employee descriptions of the volunteers they interact with. Overall, the ratings were quite positive. More than 80% of employees described volunteers as hardworking, helpful, friendly, and kind. However, less than 60% described volunteers as knowing what they are doing, being open-minded, well trained, and independent. While some employees reported very positive experiences with volunteers, others reported more neutral to negative experiences. Employees who had poor experiences with volunteers reported being more stressed, overworked, and less committed to the organisation, and they expressed greater intention to leave the organisation.

Although the findings describe only statistical relation and not causal direction, the authors believe that poor experiences with volunteers may drive employee discontent and stress rather than already discontented employees blaming volunteers for their job dissatisfaction. Ineffective volunteers can take a toll on the employee workforce and lead to negative personal and organisational outcomes. Negative employee experiences with volunteers seem to translate into ill-feelings toward the organisation itself.

The study further demonstrates the importance of volunteer management practices in creating better employee-volunteer relationships. Employees reported more positive experiences with volunteers when their organisation had any (and especially all) of the following factors: mandatory structured volunteer training; a volunteer performance evaluation system; a formal policy for handling volunteer problems; a policy for dealing with employee-volunteer conflict; formal volunteer recruitment efforts; an interview or screening process for the “hiring” of volunteers; and social gatherings to promote volunteer-employee interactions. These practices help in selecting the right volunteers, training and placing them effectively, and establishing relevant foundational policies. Collectively, these practices represent a proactive approach to volunteer resource management.

The most obvious and general implication of this project’s findings is that NFP leaders cannot take for granted employee experiences with volunteers. Positive experiences with volunteers can promote employee well-being and retention, whereas negative experiences can promote stress and a wilting commitment to the organisation. This study offers additional evidence for the need to proactively and carefully introduce and manage the volunteer component of the workplace.

To read the full article see: 

6. Helpless

By Lizzie Widdicombe, The New Yorker, January 2010

On January 12, 2010 Haiti was hit by a catastrophic magnitude 7.0 Mw earthquake. An estimated 230,000 people died, 300,000 were injured and 1,000,000 were made homeless. As in other mega-disasters, the global community reached out to help by giving large amounts of money and also by volunteering, including by people from other countries. In contrast to the title in the article “helpless” people strive to volunteer in such events in order to feel helpful and empowered in times of uncertainty.

Widdicombe describes the spontaneous offers of help by people in New York. As one of the volunteers explained: “I came here because I can’t sit and watch CNN anymore”. However, as often is the case in mega-events, there was none of the infrastructure required for volunteering. In Haiti, as Widdicombe explains, there were no hotels for the volunteers, no place for tents, no communication framework etc. A member of the Association of Haitian Physicians Abroad also explained that “Washington doesn’t want any civilian help.”

To read the full article see:
file:///C:/Documents%20and%20Settings/z3278252/My%20Documents/Knowledge%20Connect/New%20York%20rallies%20for%20Haiti%20%20The%20New%20Yorker.htm
7. Governmentalities of volunteering: A study of regional Western Australia

By David Pick, Kirsten Holmes and Martin Brueckner, Voluntas, September 2010

This is a fascinating article which examines the applicability of the concept of governmentality to the volunteer sector. Governmentality can be understood in terms referred to by Foucault (1991) as 'the conduct of conduct'; specifically it is about controlling or guiding the relationship between individuals and social institutions and communities. In light of Australia’s considerable dependence on the work of volunteers, particularly in rural areas, the exploration of the volunteer sector according to this concept is of importance.

Through interviews held with 25 volunteers and volunteer coordinators, and the analysis of policy documents, the authors conclude that “advanced liberalism” appears dominant in regional Western Australia. Advanced liberalism describes the role of government as more about ‘steering’ than ‘rowing’. As such, volunteer organisations provide many of the services which previously were the domain of government and do so with government support. The other role of volunteer organisations is to allow people to become desirable “active citizens”.

The Western Australian Government perceives volunteering as central to the idea of ‘community’ and legislates various aspects of volunteering, but the major concern seems to be managing risk, focusing on issues of background checks and insurance. Whilst the Federal government does not have any direct policy responsibility for volunteering activities, in early 2010 it launched a national compact between the government and the third sector which connects closely to advanced liberalism in that market-based solutions are the preferred option within which people are involved as individuals.

By contrast, voluntary service organisations and local community-based interest groups that rely on donations and fund-raising activities bear the characteristics of “classic liberalism”. They are independent organisations that operate according to a set of norms and ethics developed to suit their own purposes. However they often must work, to varying degrees, within government regulations and so are affected by government policy framing of volunteering as ‘active citizenship’ and sometimes have difficulty in recruiting volunteers.

The question arises as to what this research means for the delivery of community-based programs. The findings suggest that vital elements of the volunteer sector are being missed as a result of the occasional adoption of an inappropriate one-size-fits-all model of governing, leading to policies and practices that exclude some people. What may be needed is a wider approach that goes beyond ‘managing’ volunteering, one that encourages and supports those organisations that do not fit the contemporary advanced liberal model.

To read the full article see: http://www.springerlink.com/content/203550v844003152/


Book by Marc A. Musick and John Wilson. Published by Indiana University Press, 2008

Reviewed by Prof. Ram Cnaan

Twenty years ago I was able to read everything that was written on volunteers; today, Musick and Wilson demonstrate that it is no longer possible. This book is the most successful attempt to provide an authoritative review of the state of knowledge on volunteering, looking at hundreds of sources. For many reasons outlined in the first chapter, the field of volunteer study has reached maturity, with numerous scholars producing quality studies. The field is so diverse and rich that Musick and Wilson focus on a limited, although substantial, subset. The authors provide us with a thorough review of mostly sociological studies that attempt to answer the questions of who tends to volunteer, how much they volunteer (time and frequency), and for whom. This is the most authoritative text ever written about the sociology of volunteering, and I do not know of any other source that comes close to it in depth and coverage in any other discipline.

Musick is associate professor of sociology at the University of Texas, and Wilson is professor of sociology at Duke University. Wilson has published more than fifty articles on volunteerism, many in collaboration with Musick, and together they offer some of the most substantial works on volunteering, including the social resources theory which explains why people with social and human capital are more likely to volunteer. This book is an attempt to use their vast knowledge on the subject to review a large part of the existing literature.
The first two chapters of the book are general and can be useful to any scholar of volunteering. The authors devote a full chapter to the definition of volunteering. It was somewhat disappointing then that they elaborate on the complexity and difficulty of defining volunteers and leave the reader with no comprehensive definition.

The following fifteen chapters (3 to 17) are an amazingly rich journey into the sociology of volunteering. In addition to the review of the literature the authors provide the reader with their own results using a set of available surveys. Wisely, they do not include endless tables but instead refer the interested reader to a website where the relevant tables are provided.

The final chapters attempt to provide a quick review of the experience of volunteering and cover issues which are more relevant to volunteer managers. Chapter 13 is on volunteer recruitment and examines effective ways of recruiting volunteers and who is more likely to respond. Chapter 17 looks into recent trends in volunteering, focusing on volunteering by different generations. Part 5 of the book, “The Organization of Volunteer Work”, includes one chapter on volunteer tasks (what volunteers actually do and who is likely to do what); and a second on the role of the volunteer. The chapter on the role of the volunteer is the most interesting for practitioners, as it covers different aspects of volunteer management including motivating and retaining volunteers, incentives and recognition, relations with staff and clients, and job satisfaction.

Although the managerial chapters are well written, they are not at the same depth as the earlier sociological chapters. Numerous studies devoted to volunteer management and volunteer consequences are not cited in this part of the book. This section does disservice to the book as it misses issues such as the most recent forms of volunteering, including virtual volunteering and volunteer-tourism. Finally, the context of volunteering could have been enhanced by a discussion of group dynamics and the power of recruiting and managing volunteers through cohesive groups.

My various criticisms are minor and pale in comparison to the great achievement of this book. What Musick and Wilson have done is little short of a miracle. They assembled hundreds of sources and shed light on a major theme in the study of volunteering. This book is a very useful tool for all volunteer scholars and students. I take my hat off to the authors.

Prof. Ram Cnaan is the Senior Associate Dean and the Director of the Program for Religion and Social Policy Research in School of Social Policy & Practice, University of Pennsylvania. He is also the immediate past president of ARNOVA.