



Once upon a time...

STORIES ABOUT VOLUNTEERS AND VOLUNTEERING

VOLUME 5



Volunteer Wellington | Te Puna Tautoko
YOUR COMMUNITY CONNECTOR

Introduction

The dynamic of volunteering has a major commonality – it always surprises. Even standing on a street corner holding a collection box to raise money for, say, guide dogs – or some other equally good cause – can have surprises. A sudden moment of generosity when least expected; an encouraging word as the weather worsens; a new sense of how many people are going to have a better life as a result of this money I'm collecting ...

This is Volume 5 of **Volunteer Wellington's** publications *Once upon a time ... stories about volunteers and volunteering*. The 35 profiles gathered for this 2018 edition weave journeys and experiences together which cover a palette of colours. Everyone has taken the step into the voluntary sector for a different reason. These are revealed entirely subjectively, as the writers have begun the unravelling process – the why, who, how and what now. And, almost to a person, despite all the differences, there has been a surprise somewhere along the way.

Apart from achieving work satisfaction, Bronwyn Turner said of her volunteering career that there were 'unexpected' outcomes. 'I'm experiencing life more consciously. It's very easy to despair of the world we live in. Through volunteering we discover amazing people and amazing organisations. I'm a much happier person – despite everything.'

Julie Swinden, who talks about her head injury to volunteer writer Richa Kohli, also mentions 'growing and regaining, not only my confidence, but also my happiness through

volunteering.' This was a surprise for her. New migrant Sarika Arora was surprised at the new knowledge she gained as a listener with Samaritans. Geotechnical engineer Tim Kelly from Scotland was surprised at how much the interpersonal skills he was gaining as a volunteer interviewer related to the management role he had taken on in his daily professional work.

Of course the impact on people's lives goes much wider than just surprises. These stories talk about changed lives, new work opportunities, enduring and amazing friendships ... and a far-reaching community legacy. 'I shall definitely return to the community sector even though I now have paid work.' 'Now I am looking for a career with a community organisation.'

But, again using the words of Sarika Arora, 'if you fuel the fire at the right time you will then go in the right direction'. That's when the skill and creativity of the manager of the volunteer team comes into play. (Some of these stories are about the leaders and managers of volunteers.) They are the ones who lead, direct, mentor and work creatively with the different motives of their varied volunteer teams.

It is these 'leaders' who inspire and change attitudes and lives. They employ volunteers who may be highly skilled professionals, or looking for experience and involvement, or they may be struggling with health issues, lack of qualifications and have no direction or motivation.

This is the power of the voluntary

sector; the ability to make diversity happen through common causes and integrated volunteer teams. And with **Volunteer Wellington** as a pivotal connector working with all the key communities of the Wellington region – more than 400 in total – and promoting vigorously to all groups, both mainstream and those on the fringes of society, the magic of 'being involved and participating in the local' happens.

The stories in Volume 5 are a slice of **Volunteer Wellington's** overall palette. Thousands of volunteer seekers are connected every year with member community organisations. These 35 represent the many. Their ages and ethnicities are as varied as their employment status, backgrounds and motives.

But when they come to **Volunteer Wellington** a journey begins; and a story follows. Whether you are a volunteer or a manager of volunteers, on behalf of **Volunteer Wellington**, thank you all for taking part in this publication. You are inspiring.

Special thanks to the team of volunteer writers and photographers – Carolyn Williams, Richa Kohli, Suzanne Carty, Pauline Harper, Amanda Hanan, Lydia Pincott, Julie O'Brien, Jo Lucre, Jeanna Thomson, Angela Reid, to Sue Hobbs of minimum graphics for design. And thanks to all of you who have told your stories.

Pauline Harper
Volunteer writer

Julie Thomson
Regional Manager

Volunteer Wellington
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An excellent and extraordinary volunteer



Qu Shen 'Call me **Sunny** – it's easier to pronounce' moved to New Zealand from China in 2016. 'I worked as an editor in a publishing house. The job was very stable, but I wanted to learn some new skills.' She is currently studying a Master of Applied Finance at Victoria University and recently completed her Master of Professional Accounting. 'Another reason I came here was that I knew no one. It was a totally new environment and I wanted to explore something new.'

Not long after arriving in New Zealand, Sunny contacted **Volunteer Wellington**. 'I felt that it was really important to engage in life here.' She had heard that **Volunteer Wellington** was looking for university students to work as research interns for the **Vanguard Project**, working on Corporate Social Responsibility.

"This experience has been an inspiration for me."

Several large businesses are members of **Volunteer Wellington's** Employee Volunteering programme. Their employees help in the community on projects such as rubbish removal from beaches, planting trees, and helping out at schools. One example Sunny gave was working with Z Energy. 'In their contract it states that employees have one or two days per month where they do volunteer work, which they get paid for. They are a large oil company, but they also care about the environment,' she said.

After the Z Energy employees

helped in the grounds of **Ngā Hau e Whā Marae** in Paparangi Sunny interviewed them to get feedback for case studies about how this kind of project can grow in the future. 'The **Vanguard Project** is looking at how to combine the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals with employee volunteer work.'

When asked what she loves most about volunteering, Sunny replies: 'When people say thank you to me, I feel really happy. People in NZ don't feel shy about saying thank you. They are very friendly. Volunteering helps you become a better person, which makes society better.'

Sunny has also volunteered for **Vinnies**. 'I celebrated my first Wellington Christmas helping out at the Berhampore Centennial Community Centre Christmas Party. I also worked at the **Vinnies** tent at the 2017 Welcome Festival and the **Vinnies** Book Fair.'

During national volunteer week in 2017, Sunny received the Excellent and Extraordinary Volunteer Award, which she says, 'I was honoured to receive.'

When she graduates, Sunny would like to travel the country and then get a job in Wellington. 'Because of this experience I want to do something with a non-profit organisation in the future. This experience has been an inspiration for me. I look forward to contributing more and doing my best to give back to the people of Wellington.' ■

STORY BY JULIE O'BRIEN

Repurposing her life through volunteering



St Vincent de Paul's Op Shop in Kilbirnie has another revealing dimension called **Re Sew** which happens to be the base for a labyrinth of brilliantly coloured unwanted, discarded fabric and textiles that a community of volunteers is committed to reviving and upcycling.

One of these volunteers is **Jade**, a sole parent and mother of three, and she's not just repurposing scraps, she's repurposing her life. Jade was referred to **Volunteer Wellington's** Work and Income programme by her case manager. When she talked about her interest in sewing, **Volunteer Wellington** helped her connect with **Re Sew** immediately.

'I love fashion and I want a career in it.' **Re Sew** is an opportune milestone which fits into her big picture. She has already learnt a variety of skills, especially making clothes for herself and her children.

Jade, who is studying towards a

"Volunteer Wellington helped me find the perfect role."

Diploma in Fashion, is brimming with ideas. 'Through **Re Sew** I'm currently putting together a fashion show for **Women's Refuge** to be held at the end of the year. I'm managing the whole thing – the theme, collection, doing up outfits, models, lighting, DJ!' she says. Raising funds for the show and gaining a foothold in the fashion industry are her goals.

She acknowledges that she's low on income and has three children to think about, but she's motivated and determined to chase her ambition of being a fashion designer. 'Even when gas is low, I get here. I believe in myself.' Her co-worker, Sophie, points

out how quickly Jade evolved from learning the basics to having plans and bringing the right people together so that her ideas can see the light of day.

Amidst the uncertainties of life, **Re Sew** is Jade's haven. She loves that she can bounce off creative ideas with her co-workers who are also keen to help with her show. '**Re Sew** is my favourite place to come to – besides a fabric store of course!' she says cheerfully.

Paid employment is her end goal. Her strategy has been to find a volunteer role in a community clothing store that is creative and innovative. '**Volunteer Wellington** helped me find the perfect role. Volunteering showed me that if you want something bad enough you have to go out there and get it.'

In her community, she finds that women just need a boost. **Re Sew** is a great initiative that galvanises them, especially young women, into action, Jade says. Her coordinator, Caroline O'Reilly, keeps her up to date about job opportunities.

An unexpected but profound outcome for Jade has been a strong following on her social media pages of young women who draw inspiration from her. They have let her know that they've been more than able to move on from toxic relationships and create purposeful lives.

It seems fitting that Jade has chosen "Warrior Goddess" as the theme for her **Women's Refuge** show – she won't let her spirit wane. ■

STORY AND PHOTO BY RICHA KOHLI

Taking a 'middle-aged' gap year



Brendan Sweeney is having 'a middle-aged gap year'.

He is currently working on a research project to discover the impact of volunteers in the Wellington Region during the 1918 Flu Epidemic. 'My role is volunteer Project Management – working with researchers, writers, an editor and a designer. We are putting together an online publication, which is due to be out just after Armistice Day this year.

'For many years I have worked in project management and process improvement in the corporate world. I trained as an accountant, but for the past few years was Finance Manager for a large not-for-profit organisation.'

He resigned from that position with the intention of doing some projects around the house and getting fit. 'I have a nine-year-old daughter

“ My experience with Volunteer Wellington has been very positive.”

so my role has largely become house-husband and chief taxi driver!'

Brendan also wanted to give something back to the community. 'Coming from a not-for-profit background which was heavily reliant on volunteers, I knew that there were a lot of volunteers and a lot of volunteer positions.'

He intends to reenter the workforce but still plans to keep volunteering, ideally working with partner organisations of **Volunteer Wellington** on processes, budgeting, accounting.

He has 'thoroughly enjoyed working on the Flu Epidemic project. I like the atmosphere in a volunteer situation. It's relaxed. We have regular meetings, but they're very collegial meetings. In the corporate world they're not always that way. There are always deadlines and budgets to think about.'

An aspect which has particularly impressed Brendan has been the volunteers themselves. 'These people are tremendous. They self-manage. They've got a plan, they've got their objectives and they've got great skills. The quality of the people and the relaxed atmosphere is what I've noticed. And I have really liked that'.

Since joining **Volunteer Wellington**, Brendan has been surprised at how large and complex the volunteer community is. 'The partner organisations number in the 100s, the volunteers themselves in the 1000s and that's just in the wider Wellington area. I can imagine it's quite a challenge matching volunteers with organisations. What I've seen so far is that with the large database that **Volunteer Wellington** manages, they do very good job. To anyone who's thinking of volunteering, give it a go. Have a look at the range of positions that need to be filled.

'My experience with **Volunteer Wellington** has been very positive. I've found it fulfilling and my intention is to continue to volunteer with organisations through **Volunteer Wellington**.' ■

STORY BY JULIE O'BRIEN

Community house offers 'life-changing' experiences



Wendy Laird co-ordinates **Stokes Valley Community House** with the verve of a true community professional. Trained in early childhood education and since, having gathered experience in positions involving 'every walk of life', she was ready to run a community house encompassing all sectors of Stokes Valley's diverse population.

Event management and interest groups ranging from fathers' meet-ups, special-need and elder morning teas, and a knitting group, give some idea of a week for Wendy and her crew of volunteers at **Stokes Valley Community House**.

And it's her varied crew from a range of skill bases, backgrounds and ages that is the backbone of her streamlined operation. Wendy's enthusiasm doesn't wane as she talks about her relationship with probation, the local police, school principals and family members who approach her to discuss volunteering opportunities for those broadly labelled 'at risk'. The requirement to perform 'community

"People have to be part of something; they have to feel they mean something."

service' offers opportunities for life-changing experiences, says Wendy.

'I love this group,' she says. 'By working with these young ones and giving them meaningful volunteering positions, I feel I'm making a real difference in their lives.'

Her strategy is taking on one 'community hours' client at a time, finding where their potential lies, and gradually giving more responsibility as their training and experiential knowledge progresses.

When I arrived to talk with Wendy, a pleasant woman at the reception desk immediately made me feel welcome. This young volunteer had been on home detention and faced a grim future for, as Wendy said, 'some stupid mistake due to all manner of

family and school difficulties.'

Now poised and professional, she has independently run the Friday Foodbank several times and after finishing her current brief, will remain on Wendy's 'callup list' for the many house events throughout the year.

Members of the now well-known knitting group have also experienced worthwhile input into their lives— with no prodding from probation. When two keen knitters approached Wendy, prepared to be project leaders, a drive began to acquire wool, needles, patterns ... and people. Wendy's belief in volunteer-led work was as instinctual with the knitters as with the young offenders.

She supports and offers continuity, they organise and ... knit. 'When we were runners-up in the Hutt Volunteering Awards Rising Star category, I couldn't have been prouder.' Knitted objects are gifted to early childhood institutions, local schools, and the elderly.

The community development success of **Stokes Valley Community House** is that the twain do meet. Thanks to Wendy Laird's skills and dedication to inclusiveness, former offenders will be voluntary organisers of an elders' Rock Concert, they'll arrange tea for the knitters, keep the food bank running smoothly, and will be active staff in the annual Stokes Valley Children's Day event.

'Paid employment is of course everyone's aim and hope,' says Wendy, who gives regular CV writing advice and references. 'But when it's not happening, people have to be part of something; they have to feel they mean something; they have to be involved in the bigger community picture. Then their lives will change.' ■

Learning more about the local community



Vivienne Rosvall says she's a lifelong volunteer, her mother too. 'It's just what our family does. For them it's a normal part of life.'

Vivienne volunteers for many organisations in Porirua: as an interviewer for **Volunteer Porirua**, with other roles at the **Citizens Advice Bureau**, **Literacy Aotearoa**, and an English as a Second Language class – and if that is not enough, in her spare time she knits for the **Red Cross** for premature babies. All those volunteering hours add up. 'I know I should be working, I really should get a job but there's a real need out there.' Vivienne says luckily her husband understands her need and passion for her volunteering commitments.

Vivienne, a Kiwi, had been living overseas for several years. When she returned with her family and settled in Porirua she wanted to learn more about the local community.

“... so happy and confident you wouldn't have known it was the same person.”

She saw volunteer roles advertised by **Volunteer Porirua** and came in for an interview. This was so friendly – 'more like a chat with old friends than an interview' – that she knew immediately she would fit in.

She took on the interviewer role at **Volunteer Porirua**; good use of her many skills (Vivienne has a BA in education), a positive way to meet new people, good processes in place and the involvement in the community she was seeking.

After being in the role for some weeks, Vivienne talks about one of her highlights as an interviewer: 'A woman from Tuvalu came in to find a volunteering role. She was extremely shy and needed her husband to speak on her behalf. I could see the woman really wanted to volunteer but wondered if someone this shy would be able to cope with people outside her own family.'

After careful thinking Vivienne recommended the local **Mary Potter Hospice Shop**. This role starts slowly, working with the goods – sorting and pricing – and builds up to working on the till.

A match was made. Two months later this once shy woman came back to see Vivienne. 'She was on her own and so happy and confident, you wouldn't have known it was the same person.' She had come to thank Vivienne for finding her the role. 'It was so satisfying to know I had made a difference, although of course she did it herself – I just set her off on the right course; like so many people who come through **Volunteer Porirua**, she needed some help to find the right direction.'

This is what Vivienne loves about volunteering. 'By doing something so little you can make such a big change in people's lives or, as in this case, to people's confidence and self-worth.'

As for the future, Vivienne will continue volunteering, and perhaps fit in a part-time job, giving her the best of both worlds. ■

STORY BY AMANDA HANAN

Deaf with a capital D!



Monroe Taylor says simply call me 'Deaf – Deaf with a capital D!'

Monroe volunteers each week at Wellington's **Trade Aid Shop**. 'The team and I communicate through gestures and interpreting facial expressions. It's always a laugh because they don't understand sign language and I can't hear; but the jokes and comedy routines that come out of the dramatic motions we make are always entertaining. I'm also teaching them how to sign – a little bit each week: "Have a good day!"; "good teamwork"; "fair"; "thank you" and "how are you"?'

'By doing what I'm doing – helping out in the store and teaching these phrases – I feel I'm making a difference.'

When Monroe first came to **Volunteer Wellington** he wasn't sure where his skills would be of

"... in this way I can get some of the socialization I need."

most benefit. Over the years he has worked in restaurants and offices and volunteered doing maintenance and painting; but a back injury meant no more heavy physical work.

'It had to be the right match for me. I wasn't worried. I knew **Volunteer Wellington** would understand my needs and find somewhere that would be the best fit. And I was right – **Trade Aid** is that right fit for me. And it's mainly because the team there are such good communicators.'

Monroe likes the ethos of **Trade Aid**. 'It's such a fascinating place to work. There are so many interesting

countries that the goods come from.'

Being deaf means he has to rely more on his other senses. For example he finds the fabrics particularly visually stunning and especially enjoys the tactile nature of the woodwork – the patterns and shapes. 'As a woodworker myself, I am particularly inspired by the boxes that have been intricately carved by disadvantaged artisans in India using Sheesham, an Indian rosewood. I love the touch and the feel. It's beautiful, the fragrance, the way it's turned, the craftsmanship, and its ornateness.'

Working at **Trade Aid** means Monroe has discovered a skill in displaying the colourful handcrafted surprises. 'I like putting the stock out and making it look attractive. It's nice to be able to be creative.'

He also enjoys the gift wrapping – a chance to have small conversations with the public. Such a good experience, friendly and positive. 'Sometimes (in the hearing world) it's hard to communicate and this way I can get some of the socialisation I need.'

Monroe is not sure what the future holds for him; he aspires to being more creative and his goals include finding paid work in retail or the corporate sector. As for being deaf he says 'Deafness is not a disability ... maybe it's you who has the disability because you can't sign!' ■

STORY AND PHOTO BY AMANDA HANAN

Understanding life in New Zealand



EVA KARPINAY

Anjali Sheth was asked at her job interview, hoping for the position that made the most of her Bachelor and Masters degrees of Pharmacy: 'Are you motivated?'

She talked to her potential employer about her two years as a volunteer interviewer with **Volunteer Wellington**. 'I went into a different discipline in order to explore the New Zealand workplace culture and to expand my knowledge. Yes I am very motivated.'

Anjali was given the job.

At the time of this interview she had been working for almost two months at Countdown Pharmacy in Newtown, administering prescriptions, listening to patients' needs, supporting health supplement choices.

"I go to everything that brings people together in a positive way – whatever the culture, religion or reason."

Anjali arrived in Wellington from Gujarat in India two years ago to join her IT programmer husband. Other Indian friends told her about volunteering and the entry point this created for understanding life in New Zealand.

She headed for **Volunteer Wellington** and took on the position of interviewing other volunteer seekers.

'My training was important,' she said. 'During this process I learnt to feel comfortable communicating with people of all ages, cultures and skill levels. And then find a volunteering role which suited their needs and abilities.'

Impressed by finding that in New Zealand there is 'less power distance' she quickly became aware that within this 'equalness' there were opportunities to talk about ideas and suggestions. 'I always felt acknowledged and trusted. The responsibilities I was given as my interviewing role progressed helped me develop skills over and above my university studies in India.'

Through **Volunteer Wellington** Anjali was introduced to the Skilled Migrants Programme at Victoria University. This was an important stepping stone which led to a pharmacy internship in Porirua. She was becoming well equipped for her subsequent interview and her current permanent position.

Another benefit from her volunteering experience, Anjali explained, is that being part of an organisation showed her how to reach into the community.

'I heard about festivals like CubaDupa; and of course the Indian Diwali celebration. I go to everything which brings people together in a positive way – whatever the culture, religion or reason.' ■

Every chance for joy and laughter



Marianne Kerridge is a diversional therapist team leader and manager of volunteers at **Te Hopai Rest Home** in Newtown.

During her seven years in the position her attitude towards age care has moved and expanded. Originally from a design background Marianne came to **Te Hopai** as a volunteer water colour tutor. 'I've never left!' she exclaims with surprise; and also enthusiasm.

Her initial 'fear' of dementia and the complexities associated with age began to change during her diversional therapy research when doing a case study with an elderly woman.

'She sat for long periods of time in an armchair holding a large soft toy. As a conversation began and trust grew between us I learnt about an incredible life.'

This very old woman had been an aircraft pilot who, among her many assignments, had delivered equipment into danger zones during the war in Vietnam.

'I realized at a deeper level

"Volunteering has to work from both sides."

that people's lives need to be acknowledged and respected; and they need to be given every chance for joy and laughter at this stage of their lives.'

In fact knowledge of people's earlier lives is so vital, says Marianne, that among her team of varied volunteers are life story writers. 'These stories are knowledge. They remind us of everyone's journey and are of immense importance to staff and families alike.'

Marianne's approach to working with volunteers (many of whom have come through **Volunteer Wellington's** referral service) is imaginative and creative. 'During the initial interview I find out their interests and skills and where they will be comfortable connecting with older people. An activity – call it diversional therapy –

is then planned which can take place regularly.'

Jodie from the massage school is an example. 'Of course touch is important, says Marianne, 'and in the process of massage there will be connections at quite a deep level.'

Debra and her son Haydn came with the idea of volunteering together on a day-off from their usual work places, during the week. They have become involved in sewing, creating retro fashion objects and even master-minding a wearable art event at the home.

During this valued involvement Haydn learnt to knit. 'Volunteering has to work from both sides,' says Marianne.

A 10-year-old student with a history of being bullied decided to try her hand as a volunteer after school. Marianne led her to the dementia unit where she chats to residents. This unusual commitment gave the young girl an outlet for her stories 'among several grandmother figures'. She has become confident and overcome many issues.

A group of teenage boys keen to befriend the elderly, has been just as successful. Their task was to become tutors for residents wanting to enter the mysteries of Facebook! More connecting, another sort of acknowledgement and way of making people happy, says Marianne.

Van drivers, a mobile library and a men's group are all among the joyous results of Marianne's diverse volunteer team.

Note: A nom-de-plume proudly acquired by Marianne is the result of a bright pink rose she always wears. 'Everyone calls me Pinkie' ... unforgettable! ■

A story with a sweet ending!



Matthew Brown walked into **Volunteer Hutt** not sure what to expect. Having left an inner city job that he described as having had a hostile and competitive culture, he was on the lookout for a less stressful change.

‘I love process improvement and finding solutions.’ So after ‘an extremely friendly’ reception and interview with **Volunteer Hutt** he was happy to be offered a volunteer interviewing role in the office for one day a week. Naturally he accepted.

A local lad, Matthew was born in the Hutt and grew up in an idyllic lifestyle block in Whiteman’s valley. Picture horses – the whole shebang. After high school Matthew found himself at a

“Being a volunteer helped immensely with my confidence.”

career crossroad. He spent some time doing data-entry work.

Matthew spoke enthusiastically about his time with **Volunteer Hutt**. ‘It was really awesome to be back in my element. It helped me a lot at a difficult time. Being a volunteer helped immensely with my confidence.’

His role was to interview potential volunteers. ‘I really enjoyed the experience of interviewing. It was interesting to see the diverse range

of people that came in. I gained a lot of insights from the people I met and hearing their stories.’ The experience restored his faith in people and gave him hope for future work.

Enter Willy Wonka. After nine months with **Volunteer Hutt** Matthew secured a full-time, permanent job as a sales representative for Whittaker’s Chocolate! ‘It’s just been such a relief – the first permanent job I have ever had.’

Matthew acknowledged the voluntary work – ‘the gateway to employment’ – gave him the necessary confidence to move into this role. Now he has gained independence he plans to move closer to his workplace and to buy a car. For someone who describes himself as ‘not liking change’ he has certainly taken the bull by the horns and is moving ahead in leaps and bounds. There’s no stopping this lad from the Hutt. The world is his peanut slab!

Working at Whittaker’s has definitely given Matthew a new lease on life; but he still intends to maintain his ‘solid connections’ with **Volunteer Hutt** and remain involved with the office that did so much to help him gain confidence during a time of transition. ‘I will keep on doing social media stuff for them – and I will be sure to keep up a positive outlook for the future.’ ■

STORY BY JEANNA THOMSON

New skills and possibilities through volunteering



Mai Mostafa loved Dubai, a modern city in the Middle East and a comparatively easy place to live after the rigours of Saudi Arabia and the constraints of her native Egypt.

But New Zealand – where is that? No no no, was her first reaction when her husband let her know about a further job offer he had received in this faraway country. Finally, with two small children in tow, the family said ‘let’s give it a go!’

I met up with Mai two years later on day one of her new job as the Churton Park Community Centre Advocate and organiser. She was eager to talk about her journey since arriving in Wellington and how she got to this moment.

Her first aim was to become fluent in English, her third language. Arabic is her mother tongue and French a fluent second language. Mai praised the ESOL

“I found something new in my personality – I like craft.”

courses at Wellington High School.

‘I met so many different people and our main tutor, Penny, was great and always encouraging.’ And wherever she went she was ‘surprised about the people. I find positive energy every time I go out.’

As her confidence – and fluency – grew, Mai’s next step was to take on a volunteering role with **Volunteer Wellington**. She became a follow-up assistant using the telephone and making conversations to find out how people (those who have come

through **Volunteer Wellington**’s processes) were progressing with their volunteering.

‘This pushed me a lot. I was scared at first – scared to talk, scared to write! But Aileen (manager projects with **Volunteer Wellington**) kept supporting me. Day by day I practised and got better at the job until I could work things out by myself.

‘Without **Volunteer Wellington** I would be nothing ... have none of this confidence.’

Volunteering at her son’s school followed, helping out with after-school programmes involving craft and art.

‘With these activities I found something new in my personality – I like craft.’

This led to Mai herself running craft classes during the holidays at the nearby community centre. With her previous work experience always in banking she was excited by the new skills and possibilities she was experiencing through volunteering. She had also gained valuable knowledge of community life and its thread of resilience throughout New Zealand society.

When she was interviewed for her current position she was again surprised that she had so many answers and ideas; that she felt positive speaking – and listening to – English. With the rest of her family her original ‘no no no’ has now become ‘yes yes yes.’ ■

Volunteering the way to go



Tim Kelly is a geotechnical engineer from Glasgow, Scotland. Earthquakes plus the fact that his partner is a New Zealander – she’s from Dunedin – brought him to Wellington where he works with an engineering company involved with projects considering all aspects of resilience and strengthening for both new and older buildings.

Young, bright and highly skilled in his field, Tim realized when his position moved more into management of people, that he wanted to improve his communication skills.

‘I had also just completed my Chartered Engineer (CPEng) review. With that out of the way I suddenly had more free time; volunteering seemed like the way to go.’

As soon as he was interviewed by

“I’m gaining benefits which I didn’t foresee in the beginning.”

Volunteer Wellington he recognised the ideal role to help him achieve his goal. ‘I wanted to be an after-work interviewer finding “ideal roles” for other volunteer seekers.’

When I met Tim he had been part of the after-work interviewing team for six months, coming to the **Volunteer Wellington** office weekly and talking with people with a myriad of different reasons for volunteering. ‘You meet some cool people and I’m finding this

interviewing very, very rewarding. I’m gaining benefits which I didn’t foresee in the beginning.’

Moving out from a highly technical, exacting and often stressful work situation, to walk across town and be using an entirely different set of skills ... ‘makes me feel really good,’ he said.

Tim had no idea volunteer seekers would be so diverse. ‘A guy with a criminal record wanting to be a mentor and show young people how to keep out of trouble; highly qualified migrant women with limited English desperately hoping for involvement and local workplace experience; so many people wanting to feel they could use and develop skills and be of service.’

‘This role is much more complex than my people management at work,’ he said. ‘It’s about listening, directing, encouraging, having an understanding of the different community organisations and causes, finally landing on the right role(s) – and having an excited potential new volunteer leave the office with a smile on their face.’

Tim is all for the ‘human element’ involved with the face-to-face interviewing process. ‘On-line applications are of course necessary but with this method getting more detail and more interaction helps touch the right bases. ‘And again,’ he says ‘the human element is so important. We need it.’ ■

Staying positive and proactive after redundancy



GARY JONES

Denise Haronga – *Te Aitanga-a-Māhaki* (Gisborne) *Ngāti Kahungunu* (Wairarapa) – is volunteering at both **Volunteer Porirua** and **Citizen's Advice Bureau Porirua (CAB)**.

In her roles registering new volunteers for **Volunteer Porirua** and as an accredited interviewer with **CAB**, she meets many people who are in the same boat as her ... skilled people made redundant from positions they have held for many years who are trying hard to find full-time employment.

'My volunteer roles have led me to gaining new skills and confidence. I have progressed in both roles and taken on additional responsibilities. For example: this year I have moved from a small admin role at **CAB** to complete the six-week induction course to become an accredited interviewer. This role has really

"This volunteering role has really brought me out of my shell. I meet lots of different people."

brought me out of my shell. I meet lots of different people.'

After the shock of redundancy after so many years working locally as a career administrator, Denise recognised the need to keep motivated and to develop new skills. She talked about *In Work NZ's* valuable transition programme and how this led to taking on her current volunteering roles.

This year Denise has prepared for and sat through 15 job interviews. 'It's pretty hard to keep bouncing back when you are turned down for jobs

over and over again. The job market out there is tough. And preparing each job application is a lot of work.'

But she is able to fit in applying for work around her schedule of volunteer roles and ongoing study. 'I am doing a Tikanga Māori course and Te Papa Whai Rawa, a financial management course with Te Wānanga o Aotearoa. I'm also working on the last paper to finish a NZ Business Diploma. In 2008, when I was working, I completed a certificate in management with Te Tai Poutini through part-time block study.'

She also keeps in touch with former workmates and stays actively involved with friends and family. 'The job market today is very complex and challenging but I remain motivated by my advocate roles, study, friends and family and social activities.'

Her advice to those in similar situations to herself is 'stay positive, be proactive, don't sit at home ... get out, look at opportunities to fill your time while seeking paid employment – like volunteering, study, social activities, sports, friends and family time. And keep up your past work networks.'

She adds some final comments on the benefits of volunteering emphasising how the skills and experience gained are great for your CV – and keeping up good work habits.

'In my current role at **CAB** I'm enjoying the challenges of an advocacy role where I can share the lessons from my own life experiences.' ■

STORY BY CAROLYN WILLIAMS

Volunteers – the added capacity



JENNIFER MONIK

Annelize Steyn picks up a pet rabbit and places this small, warm animal in Mai's lap. Mai is very happy. The sun shines today in the garden of **Presbyterian Support Central's Enliven** residential home for the elderly – **Kilmarnock Heights Home**. And Mai is enjoying stroking the little white rabbit.

Annelize has been Recreation Officer at **Kilmarnock Heights Home** for nine years. It's a home that embraces the Enliven philosophy which is based around the Eden alternative model of care, ensuring elders have companionship, meaningful activity and enjoyment in their lives. This includes introducing animals, plants and children to the home. Annelize simultaneously created specific roles for volunteers which reflected these values.

Volunteers are the added capacity – the new story – she says. According to their interests and talents they will

“You gave me confidence ... because you trusted me.”

take on specific roles associated, not only with the rabbits, but also budgies and canaries, the fish and the cats, or follow the seasons by planting bulbs and seeds in the extensive garden.

‘Most residents have been gardeners at some stage of their lives. If they have limited movement they delight in giving volunteers a few directive instructions; others are able to help. And for everyone there's the watching as plants sprout and flower.’

Involvement and engagement is the essence of **Kilmarnock Heights Home**. ‘It may be doing or it may be observing. Having something lively (hence the brand name **Enliven**) happening all

the time in the recreation programme is our aim.’ Sewing, knitting, playing games, having current affairs discussions are all part of daily life in this village-like environment.

Annelize mentioned some of those volunteers who have been given the scope to lead and explore. Jane, who is hearing impaired, helps to facilitate the knitting group. Her words to Annelize – ‘you gave me confidence to be among people because you trusted me.’

Then there's Darryl. ‘Everyone loves him – he's so charming!’ His weekly commitments are gardening and facilitating the bowling group. Shahn came from Australia some years ago. She's found some paid work as a result of her **Kilmarnock Heights Home** experience. She continues to volunteer.

As we wander around the home stories are everywhere. The baking project in which scores of cup cakes, baked by residents with volunteer support were given to street collectors fund raising for the Cancer Foundation – another example of the home's determination to be part of life in the wider community.

Annelize spends at least an hour with every potential volunteer. She asks leading questions about people's lives which will trigger how contributions can take place according to people's skills and time-frames, she says.

These questions also mean that a group of elders aged from 70 through to 100 are involved with life; involved with seasonal change; are never bored ... and certainly never lonely. ■

A volunteer and a role model



‘Volunteering changes lives.’ It was a sign outside Porirua’s Pember House that prompted **Jenny Greer** to volunteer.

After taking time off to finish her studies, Jenny said, she missed the diversity of interacting with business colleagues and the wider community. Volunteering was a great way to fill this void.

With a Bachelors in applied business, and experience working for government and the private sector, Jenny came with a diverse set of skills and was a great fit for the interviewer role at **Volunteer Porirua**.

The business world is very much about communication, she says. ‘You actually have to converse with people to generate communication.’

“When you start working in the role all those skills come to fruition.”

She admits to being apprehensive when starting the interviewer role, however, she quickly found her feet. ‘I started to wonder about all those forgotten skills, but when you start working in the role all those skills come to fruition.’

‘Volunteering is a proactive way to keep evolving and learning new skill-sets. For people that want to enter or return to the work force, it shows prospective employers that you’re

using your time productively and that you’re comfortable in today’s work environment. That can be important at a time when the older workforce is finding it challenging to obtain paid employment.’

Well placed to mentor and encourage others, Jenny says people feel good about volunteering as they are able to contribute to the wider community.

Many prospective volunteers have a broad skill-set they are not always aware of, and her role meant drawing that information out to help match a volunteer to a position.

‘Clients come from a diverse background, be it a retiree, a person returning to the workforce or a lawyer. You have no idea what people have previously done. It’s about finding someone’s valuable skills and expanding their perspective of what volunteer practice is.’

What has surprised Jenny most on her volunteer journey is the willingness of the Porirua community to give of themselves and their time to enhance the lives of other people.

‘Someone coming in to give their time to help someone else, it’s an ongoing rotation of giving and helping.’

‘It makes our community a better place.’ ■

STORY AND PHOTO BY JO LUCRE

Volunteering: Craig's way forward



Craig Paterson, a jack of all trades, is passionate about DIY artisanship. His hands-on proclivity is not only limited to work; he spent 11 years shouldering the responsibility as a full-time caregiver for his ailing parents. Since his mother's passing, a determination to make his way back into the workforce has stirred him and his first pit stop is volunteering.

Referred by Work & Income, **Volunteer Wellington** found him roles that put his multipurpose skills to good use. He immediately took on plastering and carpet tile-laying for **Samaritans of Wellington Inc.** "Getting insight into a topical area like mental health was an added experience."

Keen to do more, **Volunteer Wellington** pointed him towards **Maritime Heritage Trust of Wellington** for restoration work at

"Volunteering is a real and encouraging way to access work."

the Hikitia crane on the waterfront. Craig volunteers there every Saturday. "Anyone interested in New Zealand history, like I am, absolutely must volunteer at the Hikitia. I'm building up to the confidence of showing tourists around the ship. I do like to greet them in their language though!"

A love for animals and prior adoption experience led him to the **SPCA Op Shop** in Johnsonville, where he volunteers twice a week. Craig attributes much of his learning to Daniela, his store manager, and at the time of this interview, was being

taught retail skills like pricing and sorting products, and the art of visual merchandising. "Volunteering gave me a routine, which wasn't always the case with caregiving. The relaxed environment here has allowed me to ease into working as opposed to the compulsions of a full-time workplace."

Shared experiences and networking have been cornerstones for Craig. He explains, "On the Hikitia, I hear stories from retired engineers and others who have faced considerable challenges and come through ... and I thought I had it tough. I've learnt that there is more than one path back to the mainstream and volunteering is a real and encouraging way to access work."

He asserts that approaching **Volunteer Wellington** is "the best decision I've made in a long time". He adds that his experience has been invariably positive; a feat impossible without **Volunteer Wellington** supporting his readiness to move onwards and upwards from what he describes as "the hardest time in my life". Of the charities he's volunteered for, he notes the kindness extended to him throughout, and how grateful they are to simply have people help.

Craig is not just a man with a tool box. He has renewed energy to step out of his conventions and see the wider picture. As he aims for paid employment, with the variety of volunteering he's doing, he feels confident about getting there. ■

STORY AND PHOTO BY RICHA KOHLI

Becoming 'more and more connected'



Lorraine Fowlie talks frankly about being included in the 'one in four' New Zealanders who experience some form of mental illness.

Up until the time of this downhill spiral, her life had been successful with everything considered 'a full life' involved in the mix. She very much enjoyed her position at parliament – 'interesting, challenging, and also demanding'.

In her early 50s, she explains clearly the decline. 'It felt as though I had used up all my resources. I was running on empty.' Work had to come to an end. And realizing there was no quick fix she took advice from her able mental health team, gradually taking on activities to begin her journey back to wellness.

Determined to keep her brain stimulated, Lorraine began with an on-line course involving further development of her writing skills. The need to feel connected and re-build self confidence was next on the list of priorities which she followed rigorously.

"I was running on empty."

Volunteering was a familiar ethic for Lorraine. Her family had always been community minded. Also the school board of trusteeship had been valuable in terms of governance, committee work and leadership.

So her approach to **Volunteer Hutt** led to roles suited to her background and experiences to date. Her first volunteering position was with **WELLME**, a support group for people with chronic fatigue syndrome/ myalgic encephalomyelitis, assisting the organisation with the writing of policies. Advice to the board of trustees helped the group become more structurally sound. They gained confidence – Lorraine's wellbeing began the gradual process of 'feeling myself once again'.

From then on **Volunteer Hutt** manager, Katie Terris, recognising

Lorraine's skills, contacted her whenever a group approached the office needing specific, qualified advice and support. Several came out of the woodwork with perhaps **The Road Forward Trust** a great example of structural streamlining as a result of Lorraine's involvement.

The Trust provides peer support to male survivors of sexual abuse through empowering survivors to take back control of their lives. Their mission states 'Abuse takes place in isolation. Recovery works well with others.'

Writing, redrafting and editing governance frameworks and service provision outlines were major tasks for her volunteering brief with this organisation. 'Making everything more readable and adding clarity were my aims,' she said.

In the process of learning a lot about different groups and the people behind the causes, Lorraine was 'meeting strangers' and becoming 'more and more connected'. And the research required her to find out about such aspects as health and safety criteria (**Supergrans** was included in this advisory mix) and taught her how to search effectively and work quickly through the complexity of several government websites. 'Typing in the right words began to come naturally.'

Lorraine talked energetically and happily. There is no doubt she is taking the right path towards refuelling her inner resources. Part-time paid employment is next on the list. She now has the confidence – and resilience – to join the job seeker market place. ■

Buddies 'give hope' to people recovering



Paul Ellis and Willemijn Vermaat talk with passion and compassion about their work as coordinators for **Buddies**, a Wellington Peer Support service for people who are experiencing mental distress. The programme – the only one of its kind in New Zealand – has been operating for 12 years and is delivered under the auspices of **Kites**.

In their joint roles as coordinators they support and train volunteer teams who become Buddies Peer Support volunteers (**Buddies**) to people currently in Te Whare o Mātaurangi, the recovery unit at Wellington Hospital. The training gives the Buddies the confidence, knowledge and wisdom to 'walk beside and give hope' as people's journey to recovery begins to happen.

Although at the time of writing this story, it was early days for Willemijn and Paul in their coordinator roles, they had already interviewed and talked with more than 20 hopeful volunteers keen to join the comprehensive training programme

"... we are walking beside people, being open and empathetic."

which will enable them to become a Buddy.

Quickly Willemijn interjects that, after this first layer of induction, the volunteer will still be a 'Buddy in training'. He/she will carry out their peer support role but accompanied by a 'graduate' more experienced Buddy. After six months of successful volunteering the Buddies graduate and receive a certificate.

Paul then takes over and talks about the importance, and significance, of Peer Support. 'Everyone who joins **Buddies** as a volunteer must have a personal lived experience of mental distress or addiction ... and being in recovery.'

Kites Trust is a peer-led organisation which means that all employees, the Trust Board members and volunteers fulfil these 'lived experience' criteria. Only then is there real empathy and understanding he says. Paul likes to use the term 're-discovery'. Re-discovery happens, he says, when a Buddy visits the ward and that powerful moment of hope is kindled.

'We've stepped into very big shoes. The training which has been carefully created for volunteers is developmental, interesting and enables people to keep moving on their re-discovering journeys.' Buddies will spend anything from six months to a couple of years or more in a Peer Support role; and with new-found confidence and an even deeper understanding of their own mental health and wellbeing, they are often ready to move into other forms of employment.

Paul and Willemijn emphasise that long-term volunteering is not the aim (although this may be an outcome for a Buddy). Rather it is about building a variety of skills (chairing and taking minutes at meetings for example), being resilient to handle volatile environments, recognising triggering situations and understanding the essentials of pastoral care.

'We keep repeating to people,' says Willemijn 'that we are not there to be "helping" people – we are walking beside them, being open and empathetic, providing a listening ear and, giving hope for a new direction. Ultimately we are growing good community people.' ■

Opening up an exciting new world



Pengbo Jiang (pictured left) came from Fuzhou in China as a young student at Newlands Intermediate. ‘I was a newby,’ he said, ‘I knew nothing about New Zealand and had very little English. But so many people helped me – they showed me the way.’

As he moved into secondary school at Newlands College he recognized the value of this help and reckoned it was ‘pay back’ time. Pengbo discovered the world of volunteering. This started in a small way with sausage sizzles; and later moved on to being a buddy for new arrivals – showing them the way.

‘I realized as I was doing this volunteering that I was also developing new skills – and gaining happiness. I felt as though I could call myself a citizen.’

“This is my hobby. I enjoy the community environment.”

After graduation from university with a BCA in commercial law and marketing, Pengbo worked in Auckland for a few years. Returning to Wellington he came into **Volunteer Wellington** to find new volunteering roles. This led to governance positions with **Interpreting New Zealand** and **Multi-Cultural Learning & Support Services (MCLaSS)**.

‘Opening up an exciting new world’ Pengbo called these experiences. Being a committee member and

publicity officer for the **NZ/Chinese Friendship Society** and a mentor with **Business Mentor New Zealand** run by **Wellington Chamber of Commerce** has meant that he has built not just experience, but also new networks and lots of goodwill.

In fact, one of his friends from the community, Jack Zhang, emphasised that through all of these roles Pengbo works to foster and enhance friendly relationships in the community and has made significant contributions to promoting and raising funds for many community projects. ‘He has made the communities he has worked with stronger and more vibrant.’

As a senior consultant with Ernst & Young how do you have time to contribute this varied and time-consuming amount of volunteering? we asked Pengbo. ‘Everyone has 24 hours in their day,’ he said with a relaxed grin. ‘This is my hobby; I enjoy the community sector environment.’

Recently Pengbo received a Volunteer Connect Award, a certificate presented annually to acknowledge the work of migrants who give so generously to the community. It follows, that since his early days in New Zealand helping out with sausage sizzles at Newlands College he enjoyed ‘feeling connected’. He has now made sure the ‘connections’ have spread above and beyond. ■

Fuelling the volunteer fire



Sarika Arora believes that if you ‘fuel the fire at the right time you will then go in the right direction’. She was referring to her several months of volunteering when she first arrived in Wellington. She was newly married, the winter was very cold, she had no work visa and she was keen for action.

From Delhi, north India, she had already travelled widely and with a Masters degree in psychology specialising in organisational behaviour, had held demanding positions with a few Indian companies.

‘I love travelling, working and meeting new people so I immediately found out about volunteering opportunities through **Volunteer Wellington**.’ Her background in psychology led to her becoming a ‘listener’ with **Samaritans**. The knowledge she gained surprised her. Some of the underlying issues of New Zealand began to be revealed in the course of being a ‘non-judgemental ear’ during the many calls and

“There is so much satisfaction in this work.”

conversations she has had during these weekly shifts.

‘I began to feel I was becoming part of the community in a much deeper way than if I had had paid employment straight off.’ More roles followed during that cold winter; Sarika was involved in full-time volunteering activity. She was happy.

She took on regular interviewing rosters with **Volunteer Wellington**. ‘This was an amazing experience. I just loved everyone who came through searching for the right volunteering role. So many were migrants like me – wanting to use and develop their skills, and meet local Kiwis. I always said “you have taken the step to come in to **Volunteer Wellington**. Now you will

find direction and you will be rewarded by what you do.”

Often people were ‘gutted’ by the struggle to find work. ‘They wanted to have a sense of belonging.’ Sarika spoke about her own learning and connections; how important it has been to approach her volunteering, and the people she interviews with an open mind. ‘I am excited by new ideas – and I love helping.’

She encouraged volunteer seekers to go outside their immediate skill base, think wider than their initial notion of what was right for them. ‘It’s those you meet too,’ she said. ‘People who work in these organisations are so nice – they’re all good humans; and are working towards making a better community.’ Some of her closest friends in Wellington have been made through her volunteering.

When her work visa came through seven months after being in New Zealand, Sarika began an earnest paid employment search. Now, with more confidence and understanding of the local work scene and culture she applied a personal approach to accompany her CV. Coffee conversations and meetups were the key she found.

At the time of this interview full-time work was beginning the following week with a talent management consultancy. Sarika is spirited, socially able and adaptable – she will continue to be a listening ear with **Samaritans**; and in the future will join the evening interviewing ranks at **Volunteer Wellington**. ‘There is so much satisfaction in this work and I will prioritise to take time out to volunteer.’ ■

Finding 'salvation' and connection through volunteering



Brazilian born **Joao Baptista Saleme** was gearing up to leave New Zealand and return to his home country. The time bomb on his visa was ticking, with only three weeks until it expired. Without a permanent position he would have to return with his wife to Brazil. But at the 11th hour he found full-time employment working in IT.

Joao is keen to talk about the voluntary work which provided the necessary pathway to finding this all-important employment.

He was walking along the streets of Petone when he saw a board outside the **Salvation Army** shop saying 'we need volunteers.' For Joao it turned out to be the perfect salvation!

He became a volunteer shop assistant with his initial role being to organise the store, price products and carry out general maintenance of the stock. Soon he was promoted to a customer-facing position, an

"It changed my life working as a volunteer. I can't describe how good I feel."

opportunity Joao embraced. Naturally shy, this was a new experience.

'I began to talk to customers and it opened my mind. I even made friends.'

Prior to arriving in New Zealand Joao worked three jobs in Brazil to save enough money for the move. He worked as a marketing manager, had his own market research company; and he also took on the task of managing the actual office building where he worked.

A plan had been hatched to re-locate to New Zealand when Joao and his wife Andrea had heard 'New

Zealand was friendly for new people'. Joao was determined to make it happen.

However, when he first arrived in New Zealand life was far from easy. 'I was not finding a way to connect with people here. I felt alone and a little sad.'

But working at both Petone and Hutt **Salvation Army** shops changed all that. Joao has nothing but positive things to say about his time spent volunteering. 'It increased my confidence, improved my English and helped me create connections with people.'

When he started at the **Salvation Army** he had no real notion of what the organisation did. As he learned about their mission and how they help so many people, he felt even happier to work there.

Joao is ecstatic that he has secured a permanent position in IT. He feels fortunate that the company he's now working for were looking for the exact skills he has. However he still works every Saturday in the shop. 'I couldn't turn my back on the **Salvation Army**. It changed my life working as a volunteer. I can't describe how good I feel.'

So after a tough start things are finally falling into place for the Brazilian soccer fan. Of course he misses not only the soccer in Brazil but also his family. They skype regularly. 'But if I had to do everything again I would as it has increased my aspirations.' ■

STORY BY JEANNA THOMSON

Volunteering leads to full-time work in chosen field



Eve Carroll is a bubbly 22-year-old who loves to talk about libraries.

‘I think people get a bit sick of my enthusiasm sometimes,’ she says, sitting on a couch in the Porirua Public Library staffroom. ‘But I’m like: “Yeah, libraries! Woo!”’

Eve got her foot in the library door through volunteer work, and believes her volunteer experience played a crucial role in landing full-time library employment.

When she was 16, Eve was a bookworm who needed to complete community service to gain the Duke of Edinburgh and Queen’s Guide awards. When her mum suggested trying the local library, Eve picked up a volunteer job shelving books at Paraparamu Library for two hours a week.

She only needed to do 18 months’ community service, but Eve loved the volunteer job so much she stayed for two years.

‘And because I was so enthusiastic and showed up every week on time,

Eve knew she’d found her professional calling.

they started giving me other extra jobs because I was really, really interested in behind the scenes and how it worked,’ she says.

‘It was really good because I could demonstrate that I was reliable, committed and hardworking.’

Eve knew she’d found her professional calling, and the volunteer stint helped her win an eight-hour-a-week job at the Porirua Public Library.

‘My manager said that the fact that I had volunteered and worked for free in a library showed that I was dedicated and serious about the career, about working in a library,’ she says.

Eve built on her part-time base hours at the Porirua library, filling in over summer and picking up extra

shifts, while studying towards a history degree at Victoria University.

She also served two years as treasurer for the university’s Toastmasters’ Club. She believes that voluntary role also helped her, because she gained further skills and attributes she could demonstrate to employers.

In 2016 Eve ‘made the big plunge’, quitting university to take up a full-time position at the Porirua library. She’s continued to study part-time though: later this year she’ll gain the Diploma in Information and Library Studies which she’s been working towards through the Open Polytechnic.

Eve feels it’s important young people take on such volunteer roles because, while she acknowledges the importance of education, she says volunteer work sets people apart from the many others who hold the same qualifications.

‘It shows that you have the drive and it shows your interest,’ Eve says.

‘So when I see other young people looking at getting jobs, I’m like: “Volunteer in your chosen area. That way you’ll show them that you’re starting to get the experience. You’ll show that you’re serious. You’re turning up, you’re treating it like paid work.”’

‘You’re basically learning, I think, how to be a good worker.’

Eve sees how valuable volunteers are to the library, too. ‘I don’t think we’d be half the library we are if we didn’t have volunteers,’ she says. ■

STORY BY ANGELA REID

Finds the strengths in her volunteer team



Lorraine Sheenagh's (pictured front row right) career as a Manager of Volunteers began with a counselling degree from WELTEC. A practicum involving mentoring through **Youthline** and other organisations working with at-risk youth introduced her to the community sector.

She recognized the experience gained through volunteering and her next step was involvement with the broader impact of a busy retail shop – Kilbirnie's **Red Cross Shop**. There were surprises in store. Combining her knowledge of psychology and now adding the supervision of teams of very different people, Lorraine found she had leadership and management qualities.

'I was so shy at first. It was the skill of my manager that drew me out of myself; gave me more confidence in my abilities.'

When this position became vacant Lorraine was encouraged to apply. 'I didn't think I was bold enough for such a role but went for it anyway!' For five

"I wanted the volunteers to feel valued."

years she was the manager of both the Newtown and Kilbirnie **Red Cross** stores, with an extraordinarily diverse team of volunteers to lead and direct.

'A baptism of fire,' she said. But quickly she knew her 'strengths-based' approach was going to pave the way for success. 'What did all these volunteers bring from their different backgrounds? How could I delegate out my role? I wanted the organisation to gain value and I wanted the volunteers to feel valued.'

Running two shops efficiently was a 'massive task' and Lorraine knew she would burn out if she didn't increase volunteers' responsibilities – in other words they had to become supervisors and trainers. The methodology worked leading to often vulnerable people

becoming proficient and excited about specific tasks they may never have done before.

Early in 2018 Lorraine became manager of **Habitat for Humanity's** 1000 sq metre retail store in Lower Hutt.

With 55 volunteers Lorraine again uses her delegation skills – 'I was pushed and encouraged. I now do the same.' She notes people's interests and discovers their strengths. Trade Me, social media, a truck policy (rules and regulations around pick-up and distribution of goods), supervising of the different floor spaces are all taken on by volunteers.

Buddies who supervise and train others extend Lorraine's role by releasing her from 'having to do everything ... a common mistake in the voluntary sector. The volunteers feel purposeful – and grateful.'

A group of 14 and 15-year-old boys come in regularly to take photographs for Instagram and Facebook. 'They're hungry to learn and have lots of cool ideas themselves.'

Lorraine talks about the inevitable issues which arise with such a varied workforce. 'Yes there were moments when I felt out of my depth,' she says. 'With one incident I sought out the wisdom of Katie Terris, manager of the nearby **Volunteer Hutt** office. She was incredible. And as a member of the Hutt Peer Support group for managers sharing of such experiences is invaluable. Talking through issues is always the way to find a solution.'

She looks out from her small office to the shop floor – there's a queue at the till, the volunteers are confident. 'They're running the place,' says Lorraine with a grin. ■

Volunteering leads to fulfilling career change



GARY JONES

Darrin Hopper is having to make a career change after 22 years as a panel beater and spray painter. Injuries and resulting arthritis in his knees and shoulder mean that the tough work of vehicle restoration – with all its bending, kneeling, lifting and standing – is no longer possible for him.

After surgery and many months in physio and rehab, Darrin is being assisted by his ACC case manager and **Volunteer Porirua** to find a new career path. They have encouraged him to volunteer and to take on training courses.

‘Two surgeons have told me that I need to change my profession,’ Darrin explains. ‘Volunteering has enabled me to try something I was always interested in, to see if I like it and it

“Volunteering has enabled me to try something I was always interested in, to see if I like it ... ”

suits me. And I do and it does!’

Darren is currently volunteering at **Whitford Brown**, a day programme for adults with intellectual disabilities.

Says **Whitford Brown Community Trust** manager Sharon: ‘He can repair anything and enjoys helping our clients with practical tasks and sporting activities. Now he is keen to start teaching interested clients woodwork, helping them with their occupational

tasks (our clients make candles and assemble cheese slices to earn money for the expeditions and adventures that they plan together).’

Darrin has also taken the chance to complete a **Red Cross** first aid course and a basic computing course, both of which are useful for his work at **Whitford Brown**.

With four children, Darrin is keen to get back into full-time paid employment. He is hoping that a position at **Whitford Brown** will come up and he will be able to pursue a new career in assisting those with intellectual disabilities, for which he has developed a real passion.

‘As soon as I met the **Whitford Brown** team I felt changed as a person. I fitted in straight away and have bonded with the other staff and the clients. I want to stay and they want me to stay. I really hope it is possible. Every day is different and I feel that I am making a difference in people’s lives.’

Thanks to **Volunteer Porirua** and ACC Darren reckons he has found his perfect place. The past year has been an emotional roller coaster ride with the diagnosis, surgeries, physio and rehab and the news that he had to change career direction after 22 years.

‘But after a tough few months I think things are on the up and up.’ ■

STORY BY CAROLYN WILLIAMS

Volunteer experience creates career choices



GARY JONES

Logan Amer was a typical university student in his second year of a BSc when he began to wonder about the direction his life was taking and whether his course of study was right for him. During all this uncertainty he suffered a breakdown in health which led to a spell of depression.

To re-establish routine and activity in his life, he volunteered at **Whitford Brown Community Trust** in Titahi Bay. This facility offers day activity programmes to adults with intellectual disabilities, encouraging participation and inclusion of clients in community activities.

Logan's role was to help set up a social committee for clients to decide how money earned from a candle-making enterprise could be used beneficially. This involved organising and supporting different visits and experiences in the wider community – horse and beach visits, shopping expeditions, café and pizza outings.

Centre manager Sharon Malley spoke glowingly about Logan's

“I think I can really make a difference to people's lives ...”

contribution. 'He has made a huge impression here as an enthusiastic and caring volunteer and now as our admin/supervisor. He is a constant source of support and innovation. Whether he's helping guide our IT into the 21st century, or playing silly games with the clients, Logan can always be relied upon.'

The centre caters for more than 40 clients and they have well organised areas with computers, games, arts and crafts, reading, a gym and exercise area, indoor bowls and work sections.

Logan tells us how he has moved from his initial volunteer role with clients to his now paid position in the organisation.

'When I started as a volunteer last year, the manager and assistant

manager were brilliant, helping me to regain my confidence, and gradually giving me more responsibility and encouraging me to develop new skills. I started building relationships with clients, helping them with their activities and playing games.

'A year later I was offered a paid position here which includes administration, some IT work and supervision; and gives me room to further develop my skills – especially in the funding application area.'

Logan has become 'passionate' about this sector and improving the lives of adults with intellectual disabilities. Currently he is investigating funding for laptops for the centre's vocational training programme. 'Whatever work our clients may do it will likely need at least some basic computer experience,' he says.

And adds: 'Clients here are quick to remind me that I am also here to entertain them and be their mate, so a big part of my time is working with them directly.' As an experienced lawn bowler via Titahi Bay Club – of which he has been a member for nine years – Logan enjoys coaching clients in a game they love.

When he was at university, Logan thought about teaching and sharing his passion for science. Now he's not so sure. 'I think I can really make a difference to people's lives using my skills in this sector.'

He's only 23 so he has plenty of time to make his mark and add to the lives of people in whichever sector he decides is right for him. ■

STORY BY CAROLYN WILLIAMS

‘Intense need’ to remain connected



Bronwen Turner speaks about a recent time in her life when persistent illness prevented her from taking on full-time work. She had held interesting positions globally – including being involved with her own company – and now she’d landed back in New Zealand, was in her late 50s; the future did not look upbeat.

Library work, establishing systems and a love of the world of words had all been part of Bronwen Turner’s cosmopolitan and varied life.

‘I had always been defined by my work. Suddenly my view of my own self worth was challenged. I needed to achieve – even if in a part-time way – feel I was contributing and doing something I was good at.’

Bronwen said she had an ‘intense need’ to remain connected to the community; to get out and to rejoin the life in Wellington in which she had once been so active.

Volunteering seemed the obvious

“I’m a much happier person – despite everything.”

option. Unsure of where or what, she went to **Volunteer Wellington’s** website and began this ‘new life option’ with a retail role at the **Mary Potter Hospice Shop** in Thorndon.

During her year there she quickly recognised the importance of the role of the manager of the volunteer team. ‘A creative, skilled manager of volunteers understands each volunteer’s potential, their different motivations and how to knit a diverse team together to fulfil the mission of the organisation.’

Finding a role more involved with administration and database systems was her next volunteering step. ‘Unless we pay attention to our skills and the

talents we know we have, they can wither ... along with confidence and self-worth.’

Again she referred to **Volunteer Wellington** and this time decided on the face-to-face interview matching process. ‘As soon as I walked into their environment I was taken over by the friendliness and welcoming feel of everyone in the office. I want to work here I said to the interviewee!’

And yes, there was a currently active role on the **Volunteer Wellington** database. Bronwen applauded the team who were quick to spot her multi-faceted skills – ‘they knew how to challenge, extend and, in my case, always check for capacity and energy levels.’

She enjoyed the immediate sense of being part of a team where there was no division between paid and unpaid staff. ‘Everyone is recognised and acknowledged for the part they play, whether small or large.’

Besides general administration and database monitoring, Bronwen has also been a key player in reformatting and editing **Volunteer Wellington’s** Business Continuity Plan – a necessary tool for emergency preparedness.

Apart from achieving work satisfaction Bronwen has found there is an unexpected side effect to her volunteering career. ‘I’m experiencing life more consciously. It’s very easy to despair of the world we live in. Through volunteering we discover amazing people and amazing organisations. I’m a much happier person – despite everything.’ ■

Discovery and purpose



DuDway Ko thinks Paraparamu beach is amazing – he thinks all New Zealand beaches are. The first time DuDway saw the ocean was in New Zealand.

Arriving from Thailand with his mother and brother in 2006, he came to New Zealand seeking a better life with more opportunities in education and healthcare.

DuDway completed a Diploma in IT at Whitireia Polytech and with the support of a sponsor contacted **Volunteer Porirua** to find a voluntary role. His position at Porirua's **Mary Potter Hospice** on Fridays utilises some of his savvy computer skills. He sorts their books and posts them on Trademe for sale.

Some of the books are very old and

Living in New Zealand is a stark contrast to his early days in a refugee camp.

rare and sell for a good price, he says.

His favourite part of the job is finding a great book. The avid sci-fi fan likes the opportunity to find interesting books while sorting them. Stephen King is his author of choice, however, he stops reading his novels when they get too scary but always returns to finish them in the end.

DuDway said the first few years

in New Zealand had been hard but eventually he got used to it. Volunteering has been helpful in making the adjustment.

It was hard to leave family and friends behind and also to learn a new language and new culture.

Living in New Zealand is a stark contrast to his early days in a refugee camp and the monotonous routine there of going to school, coming home and collecting water for his family twice a day. He says the water there was not very clean and he is appreciative of New Zealand's clean water.

Food in particular took time to get used to. Initially DuDway was not keen on New Zealand fare but over time tried different foods and now finds them okay. His ultimate discovery, having never tried it before, was cake.

Though DuDway does not talk to people often as it is hard to communicate at times, he acknowledges the Kiwi friends who he talks to everyday as he has made many friends in New Zealand.

'It's quite hard when I first meet people but after a while it is easy for me to talk to them,' he says.

DuDway says his future goal is to find a paid job, something involving computers. ■

STORY AND PHOTO BY JO LUCRE

The importance of ‘social connectedness’



Tyler Wickham’s career as manager of volunteers with IHC Wellington came about as a result of his volunteer experience.

While still at university studying health science and physiology he took on a befriending role with a young man with an intellectual disability. With first-hand knowledge of the importance of ‘social connectedness’ he felt excited about working closely with both the volunteer team plus those who were seeking a ‘friend.’

Despite ‘stumbling’ into the position he now says, one year later ...’ some of the most interesting things in our lives happen through stumbling, one activity leading to another.’

In fact, continuously building new networks and social connections is Tyler’s *modus operandi*. The main elements of his co-ordinating role are to match volunteers with people who have a disability, ‘looking for a friend.’

The brief of Tyler’s own volunteering had been to introduce Edward, his

“I talk about the programme all the time!”

friend, to the gym and different methods of getting fit. Now he is in the game of matching, on a one-to-one basis, people’s interests with people’s needs.

‘Having a friend adds quality to life and the independence that every person with a disability desires. It could be catching the bus, using Eftpos, cooking, or learning to live compatibly in a flat ... more meaningful socialising is always the aim.’

Biennial surveys run by IHC indicate how ‘overwhelmingly positive’ it is to have a friend who *is not paid; is not mum or dad; and who does not have a disability*.

‘It’s all about expanding social

connectivity and engaging in a number of different ways.’

IHC is an organisation with excellent processes and systems, says Tyler. After volunteers undergo an initial introductory and training procedure the key ingredients of flexibility and consistency are explained and emphasised.

‘Being consistent and reliable is as essential as it is with any friendship.’

Excellent support in his role has been another plus for this ‘stumbled upon’ position. ‘My manager really promotes and understands the creative aspect of the position of manager of volunteers. I have also been part of the **Volunteer Wellington** run peer support group for those working with teams of volunteers. Also I have a mentor – a manager of volunteers – with whom I can talk over ideas and learn other ways to think about things.’

Workshops run by **Volunteer Wellington** likewise ensure organisational connectedness with the volunteer-involving community – plus stimulus and new learning.

Tyler’s aims now are to create more awareness among other support agencies about the significance of people with a disability having a friend. ACE House, Autism NZ and all the IDEA Services bases are included. And from the other side, with every group or network he meets with, he mentions the personal rewards of being a volunteer.

‘You never know when or where the next volunteer friend will come from. I talk about the programme all the time!’ ■

Volunteer's open mind leads to 'dream job'



Jenny Zhang is a Chinese migrant who isn't afraid to expand her horizons. This outlook has led her to volunteering, discovering new things and building her skill base.

After moving to Scotland for university and completing her degree in International Business, Jenny was recruited into Tesco's graduate programme where she was transferred back to China as a retail buyer. At this point Jenny met her partner, who was living in New Zealand, so she took the leap and moved to Wellington.

A completely new country and group of people is intimidating, but Jenny saw it as an opportunity. 'I knew from the start I wanted to volunteer. My original goal was meeting new people and trying something different,' Jenny said.

Within her second week of being in New Zealand Jenny started contacting potential workplaces **Volunteer Wellington** had suggested. Through this she found a job as a volunteer general helper at **Brooklyn Resource Centre**.

“Try something different, build opportunities, and build life experiences ... ”

The **Brooklyn Resource Centre** serves meals for the elderly, gives them a chance to gather with others, and organises speakers for them to enjoy. Jenny discussed the benefits of the job. 'I was able to meet other volunteers and connect with the community. I was also asked to do a speech about my travels – which proved as useful experience for my CV,' she said.

While she was at the **Brooklyn Resource Centre**, Jenny continued taking on additional volunteer roles. 'I wanted to make the most of my time,' she explained.

This led her to starting a volunteer retail job at **Mary Potter Hospice**. She also had a go at tree planting at

Otari-Wilton Bush – yet another new experience for someone accustomed to the concrete jungles of Shanghai.

At this stage, Jenny's purpose for volunteering started to change. 'I started to want a volunteer role that would help me get paid. So I began looking for volunteer admin roles,' she said.

From her search, Jenny found a job as an interviewer at **Volunteer Wellington**. While there she also got to promote **Volunteer Wellington** to students at **Victoria University of Wellington**. 'Taking every opportunity I'm given has enabled learning experiences and personal development,' she expressed.

It was quite a journey but the time came to start looking for paid work. Within her first week of searching Jenny found her 'dream role' working at Weta Workshop and Weta Cave doing retail work and tours.

'Volunteering gave me proven experience for my cover letter. In the interview I stressed my volunteer experience and had plenty of relevant examples I could use to impress the interviewers.'

Jenny felt surprised and excited to receive the job from Weta and says volunteering played a big part in her confidence when applying to the role.

Her advice for others interested in volunteering would be that while people might not find a role specifically related to their industry, it's still a worthwhile experience. 'Try something different, build opportunities, and build life experiences, because you never know what will happen.' ■

STORY BY LYDIA PINCOTT

Volunteering is for life!



ALESSANDRA ORSI

Raima Harding is no stranger to volunteering. 'We travelled around a lot due to dad's work with charities – the U.N., Red Cross and Red Crescent. I was born in Malaysia and raised in the U.K.' When she was 10, her family moved to New Zealand.

After graduating from Victoria University with a BSc in English Literature and Psychology, Raima took a break to go travelling. She went to Nepal and worked in a women's shelter for three months and after that, had a placement in Sri Lanka teaching English to people with special needs. 'It was awesome and rewarding but also very challenging and it made me appreciate my life in New Zealand.'

However her enthusiasm for volunteering had begun. When she returned home, she contacted

"I'm always way happier at the end of my training. It's the best hour of my week."

Volunteer Wellington. 'I hadn't done any volunteering in New Zealand and I wanted to give back to the community I live in. I saw a role description on the **Volunteer Wellington** website for a football coach for **Special Olympics**. This was a dream opportunity with my two passions – football and mental health – coming together,' she said.

'Among the Special Olympians there are some really good players. And as well they are the most kind, fun people

I know. I get as much out of it as they do and I'm always way happier at the end of the training. It's the best hour of my week.'

But for 23-year-old Raima, her volunteering doesn't stop there. She is also a support leader for **Peer Tree**. 'It's a group that gets together once a week and meets up with youth that are at risk or distressed and we all just hang out at a coffee shop and talk. It's a chance for them to chat about anything at all.'

Her third volunteer role is through **ELTO – English Language Training for Officials** and run through Victoria University. Government officials from South East Asian countries and Africa come to New Zealand to develop their English language skills.

Raima meets with a young woman from Myanmar who is doing a course in economics. 'It's not about teaching English, but rather having conversations and being a friend. I love meeting with her and I'm getting to learn lots about her life and culture as well.'

Recently Raima has been accepted into a two-year Post Graduate Masters Programme in Clinical Psychology in the Netherlands. When asked if that will be the end of volunteering she replies emphatically, 'No. It's fun and rewarding for me, too. Volunteering is for life!' ■

STORY BY JULIE O'BRIEN

Unlocking potential through volunteering



Jeffrey Kidd is the volunteer administrator who, twice a week, is at the helm of **Volunteer Wellington's** reception area. His commitment to work is aptly matched by the sharpness of his attire.

Jeff came through **Volunteer Wellington's** Work and Income programme to find a volunteering role where he could feel worthwhile and regain his independence. He saw volunteering as a pathway back into the workforce of which he was once a part.

'I wanted to get out and be useful. I love office work, especially working with people. I'm very happy with this admin role.'

With **Volunteer Wellington's** support and training, and his own zeal to be proactive, Jeff has exceeded everyone's expectations. What began as a position for doing follow-ups with volunteers interviewed in order to seek placements in the community, has evolved into a more complex role.

"I just love being trusted to do more. I feel I actually matter."

It includes meet and greets, liaising with organisations to support the management of their volunteer needs, updating records ... and a range of other duties.

'I just love being trusted to do more. I feel I actually matter,' he says.

During the past four months with **Volunteer Wellington**, Jeff has seen his potential unlock. A resounding discovery has been the confidence he has gained from venturing out of his comfort zone. 'I've never taken roles in the past where I had to make calls and interact with people. I'm enjoying it – putting people at ease, connecting them to roles that make them happy, getting feedback about the good work

we do here at **Volunteer Wellington.**'

Aileen Davidson, Manager Programmes, points out that 'he deals with varied people appropriately. He grew this role like no one else, he ploughs through and looks professional while he's at it.'

But his experience hasn't only been limited to gaining new skills and attributes. Volunteering has expanded his worldview and given him new insights. He has been 'mind-boggled' by the scope of volunteering opportunities available through **Volunteer Wellington** as well as the cultural diversity of New Zealand.

His work has made him aware of the importance of listening and being mindful of other people, especially those from different nationalities and often without English as their first language. 'I think that no matter which volunteer role you take, there are always opportunities to get a great deal out of it if you actually keep an open mind.'

With **Volunteer Wellington** as a reference, he now feels confident to move into paid employment; and, at the time of this interview, was beginning to apply for roles in office administration. 'I'm very positive about where things are going and how I'm feeling now compared to where I was four months ago – a total change.'

Jeff also volunteers with **Conservation Volunteers**, another opportunity he jumped at in order to get more hands-on experience. Volunteering is instrumental in fulfilling his urge for both enterprise and self-reclamation. ■

STORY AND PHOTO BY RICHA KOHLI

Food is the connector at Kaibosh



Ondine Brown (photographed right) was introduced to **Kaibosh Lower Hutt** by a friend who encouraged her to join the volunteer team. Ondine had worked in sport and recreation roles with Upper Hutt City Council always focussing on aspects of community development.

‘**Kaibosh** made total sense – to collect food which would otherwise be wasted and then redistribute it to organisations that support people in need. Food is the connector – it starts a good conversation.’

When Ondine took on the manager of volunteers role earlier in the year it ‘made total sense’ for her to now be a permanent staff member with the organisation she had come to love during her volunteering stint.

Four hundred kilograms of food are sorted daily with 80 volunteers working for two hours on weekly or fortnightly rosters. During their induction with Ondine they become

“I am utterly amazed at how loyal they are and how much they care.”

aware of the **Kaibosh** vision of zero food poverty, zero food waste. From the beginning they feel included and involved with work that matters. ‘And conversations start to happen with the 13 donors and the approximately 36 community groups who receive the food from **Kaibosh Hutt**.’

Donors are local supermarkets, fruit and vegetable suppliers and various other local food distributors. Ondine organises the numerous groups of five to six volunteers who come in throughout the day on regular shifts to sort and box the food according to the needs of the recipient community.

And it’s at these sorting tables

that the conversations begin, she says. ‘Everyone is amazingly diverse – retirees, doctors, managers, unemployed people in transition, young students who are carrying out Duke of Edinburgh objectives, others just keen to be involved with the **Kaibosh** mission. They are interested in one another and they are also very interested in the community that will receive their box. A new dynamic is being revealed as they work.’ This is the community development part of her role which Ondine loves.

She is full of praise for the system she inherited. ‘It’s easy and professional – the best I have ever worked with.’ In fact she describes the low-key rooms in Dudley Street as so efficient that the volunteers – once she has gone through their thorough initiation – are able to be entirely independent. ‘They run themselves with each team training the newcomers. I am utterly amazed at how loyal they are and how much they care.’

Ondine is a member of the Lower Hutt Peer Support group for Managers of Volunteers organised by **Volunteer Hutt**. Hearing from others working with volunteer teams, sharing ideas and ways of acknowledging and celebrating the work which keeps the community alive, is always valuable, she said.

‘Being aware and reminded that volunteering always leads to something is vital. Maybe it’s a friendship, a work opportunity, a new skill ... it’s about being involved and participating.’ ■

A good reference – a turning point



Chris Golder likes creative writing. Poetry mainly – it's an honest way of articulating personal ideas and thoughts, he says.

When redundancy hit and unemployment started to become longer term the frustration of 'turned down' job applications led Chris to **Volunteer Wellington**. Time was passing for this qualified (Chris has a BA from Victoria University in English and statistics) job seeker; and the fact that potential employers kept asking for a 'recent, relevant reference' was not helping.

He figured that, if he could find worthwhile volunteering work, his chances of obtaining that much needed 'recent, relevant reference' would be a light at the end of his job-seeking tunnel.

"I owe Volunteer Wellington – and I like it here."

The position he took on after a face-to-face interview was appropriately 'creative writing' with **Volunteer Wellington**; his brief was to re-write volunteer role descriptions, giving them pizzazz and an edge of excitement which would draw people rather than bore people.

Volunteer Wellington works with approximately 400 community organisations who list their volunteering positions on the organisation's database. Around 500 are active at any one time. So Chris's

weekly stint potentially had a long life and plenty of variety.

The regular 'and quite challenging' work – plus the company of a cheerful, busy office team – meant that he was active, motivated and above all, he adds, optimistic.

After a few weeks in the position, Chris asked his immediate manager, Charlie, if he would write him a reference ... something Charlie was more than happy to do. 'Chris's work had always been excellent. He was reliable, conscientious – and creative.'

That was the turning point; in poetic terms a definite pirouette! Suddenly Chris Golder had two interviews in one week; the job he has taken on is with Contact Energy as part of the Information and Data Management team. His brief includes many of the technical skills he learnt while working on the **Volunteer Wellington** database. Perfect. 'Yes,' he says looking back, 'the reference worked.'

On Wednesday evenings the **Volunteer Wellington** office stays open in order to give volunteer seekers flexible time-frames. Chris has now joined this after-work team continuing to be a weekly creative writer; and with some reception tasks thrown in. 'I owe **Volunteer Wellington** – and I like it here.'

There's a loyal streak in Chris Golder, that's for sure. ■

A push in the right direction



Hiyam and Zeinab Ali, two sisters with refugee backgrounds, came from their home in Sudan to New Zealand nearly 10 years ago. It's been difficult to navigate some of the challenges they have faced – particularly those associated with finding employment.

On the suggestion of a **Red Cross** work broker (both sisters are Work and Income clients) they came to **Volunteer Hutt** to find volunteering roles which would give them experience as well as opportunities to hone their English. They were also keen to volunteer, both said, because they wanted to give back to a community that was so generous upon their arrival.

Now they are paving their way side by side at **Volunteer Hutt** as volunteer interviewers, helping place others in volunteer roles that fit their needs.

Hiyam has been to school here and studied Political Science and International Relations at Victoria University. A short-term internship with Z Energy has given her some work experience; but full-time employment

“The friendly and supportive work environment makes the role more exciting. I’ll never stop volunteering.”

remains hard to find. ‘I want to work as a humanitarian,’ she says.

Zeinab’s only exposure to a work environment in the 10 years she’s been here is her current volunteering role. ‘I am qualified to be an accountant and I was working in Sudan but it’s not easy to find a job here,’ she says. Both women are competent and share an ambition for full-time employment. But they have been faced with difficulties in their new home which has bruised their confidence.

Therefore it was reassuring to find that the sisters were adamant about the palpable change in their confidence since they began

volunteering at **Volunteer Hutt**. Says Hiyam, ‘I was terrified of phone calls when I started but I faced the fact and just went for it! I went from having a low voice to being assertive and that really helped in my internship.’ Zeinab agrees that ‘being face to face with people’ is a push in the right direction.

Their tasks are to talk with volunteer seekers, explain the personal gains from volunteering, and find the most suitable roles. ‘To see others doing what they like makes us very happy.’

The diversity of people they deal with has also been pleasantly surprising, they said. **Volunteer Hutt** manager, Katie Terris said the interview role is demanding as the people coming through have wide-ranging needs; and it’s also necessary to become familiar with several local community organisations. ‘Hiyam and Zeinab are handling all this new information exceptionally well.’

Prior to **Volunteer Hutt**, volunteering was uncharted territory for Hiyam and Zeinab. They are grateful for the opportunity. ‘The friendly and supportive work environment makes the role even more exciting. Even when I get a job I’ll never stop volunteering,’ Hiyam says. As for Zeinab, Katie is keen to find her an accounting role from among her many networks.

The ‘give back’ experience which first took the sisters to **Volunteer Hutt**, has turned out to be a major booster for their confidence, interpersonal skills, as well as a reciprocal sharing of cultural awareness and sensitivity. ■

STORY AND PHOTO BY RICHA KOHLI

Volunteering – a right of passage



Richa Kohli has moved around the world extensively. With parents involved in the Indian foreign service (her father is currently the Indian High Commissioner in New Zealand) she has lived in, besides India, the Middle East, Russia and now Wellington.

‘I had developed a sense of disengagement – I never know how long I will be anywhere.’ But the year she graduated from Massey University with a degree in communications was different. Richa became ‘immersed’ in volunteering.

Everyone in New Zealand talks about volunteering, she said. It felt like a necessary right of passage. Her surprise was that some of the opportunities available were so skills-based. But her list of surprises grew as she took on the role of volunteer writer with **Volunteer Wellington**.

Besides developing writing skills, for Richa the position took on a new dimension because of the fact that

“... a time of accelerated learning.”

she was interviewing people who had signed up for **Volunteer Wellington**’s Work and Income programme. She was assigned to interview and write about people who had often been marginalised or isolated from mainstream New Zealand.

‘Not being a native citizen I was unaware of the socio-economic issues pertaining to people in such circumstances. These stories gave me a chance to have a deeper understanding of New Zealand’s social welfare system.’

Everyone she spoke with wanted to make something positive out of their volunteering opportunities. ‘They were honest with me and, despite

our differences, I sensed our common goals. They often had so little but they were reaching out, eager to make the most of their volunteering journey.’

Richa’s profiles have included refugees from Sudan, a sole parent working with fashion and sewing through **Vinnies Resew** project, people who may have had a chequered past but were taking hold of this volunteering experience to develop a positive CV, and references.

‘Any preconceived ideas about why people are where they are, were dismissed. I now see that we all have different motives for volunteering; and they are all valid.’ The most rewarding outcome of all, she said, was that as she wrote these stories, ‘almost always people achieved their goals’.

Richa’s next surprise was that after several weeks of writing she was approached by publisher Roger Steele of Steele Roberts, to take on an internship with his company. At the time of this interview she was working with him almost full-time.

‘Both my volunteering and this work has been a time of accelerated learning; and recognising how boldly we can live our lives.’ Her goal now is that the rest of the world will read her stories and know a little more about the impact of volunteering on so many people and their immediate communities.

‘How else are people going to know about the opportunities, the rewards, the personal benefits of volunteering and the way so many have turned their lives around – except by reading about them.’ That’s real communication, she says. ■