

**Monash Volunteer Resource Centre
Volunteering Conference**

**The Future of Volunteering –Eastern Region
17 August 2010**

Introduction

- Acknowledge Kulin nation and elders, past and present
- Acknowledge extensive successful work of Volunteer Resource Centres who are hosting the Conference (Monash, Boroondara, Eastern) and the volunteering work of attendees (N.B. Rae Kum – long time Coordinator at Monash).

1. Volunteering for Joan Kirner, A Steep Learning Curve

- 1.1 My mother's experience as a traditional helper and carer. E.g. Mothers Club, Canteen, CWA. Church, flowers, Meals on Wheels, pianist for boys gym and girls calisthenics, bowling club selection etc.

My memories of her volunteering experience include my Primary School burning down and all the equipment for which they had worked so hard, burning with it. Mum's enjoyment and her making of lasting friendships. Mum's expectation for myself that as a new mum I would become a mother's club member. But out of my mother's experience, I made my role not only personal but political.

1.2 My own volunteer experience: Presbyterian Fellowship Association door knocking on drinking hours, working for sporting clubs, school fetes and school canteens. These activities morphed into politics, saw other possibilities to not only help the system but to improve and change it; e.g. lobbying as a parent club for more classrooms and better trained teachers.

Then through my membership as the state school parent on PM Gough Whitlam's Schools Commission from 1973-78, I was able as a volunteer to experience and contribute to volunteering which was directed at making a difference through the place based programs for Disadvantaged Schools and Country Education. I am pleased to be still doing that today as part of this State Government's place based Community and Neighbourhood Renewal programs and it's working. [Give example]

- o Networking and Advocacy

- It was on the Schools Commission and other State-wide Committees that I learned the importance of networking and advocacy to volunteering for ongoing funding and collective action.

2. Future of Volunteering

I've never felt that the word volunteering is an adequate description of what we as volunteers and community activists do. Yes, sure we are unpaid and

we do it of our own free will. But isn't it more than that? For me, being a volunteer is part of the story of what we do, but not the whole.

Moreover, in many ways we do get paid: paid by the successful outcomes resulting from our participation with other people in making a difference. For individuals and groups: e.g. for my own child, my child's school and the whole education system.

From the 1970s, I have seen my volunteering as part of my role in civil society as a citizen, a community activist working with others to shape a better future for me, my child, other parents, other families and the broader community. For me, volunteering is about whether I can help change the world as well as I participate in caring for people and meeting some of their need for better services. And I can see from your Annual Reports that is exactly what you are doing. Thank you for your work.

It is however, important to note as we will have learned from the appearance of CFA members at the Bushfire Inquiry, that to be an effective volunteer organisation, you have to be funded for effective backup. For example in the case of the CFA, they need to be funded for more effective communication systems and professional training.

Perhaps governments will become more keen to fund bodies like Volunteer Resource Centres for network administration and support if they saw you as actually building citizenship, inclusion and democracy in partnership with

governments, federal, state and local. I know that's what many of you are aiming for, but is that where the dialogue between government and volunteers is centred? Or are there some in volunteering and in government who see the community activist approach as too risky?

For further discussion on these issues, please look at the excellent project summary report of the Eastern Metropolitan Region, May 2008.

3. Care Services and Causes: Three parts of the volunteer whole:

I'm pleased to note that part of preparing for the current and future role of volunteering is embracing all the key parts of volunteer work Care – Service – Causes. While a number of reports and community and government discussions suggest that volunteering needs to change from an emphasis on the care sector (e.g., visiting, tutoring, shopping, outings) and the services sector (e.g. accounting, I.T, events organisation, playgroups organisation and transport) to more cause related volunteering (e.g. save our suburbs, Community and Neighbourhood Renewal, climate change, refugee support etc.)

I don't think today's volunteering necessarily requires a shift from one to another kind of volunteering, but I do welcome our growing acknowledgement that volunteering means working together to build active citizenship in our society across a broad range of areas. This view is explained effectively in the 2008 Evaluation Report of the Sustaining Volunteering Initiative undertaken

by the South West Community Capacity Consortium funded through a DPCD Volunteer Support Grant. [www.swvolunteerinitiative.org.au] I encourage all of you to read that report and discuss it as a group. I believe its recommendations provide a framework for volunteering for the future, especially on the need for collaboration between local volunteering resource centres and local, state, and federal governments.

[NB. Can I just pause here to thank Local Government in these 3 municipalities for their great support for volunteering. I would really like to see how this cooperative local government partnership with the local community could be extended to include the state and federal governments.]

4. Recommendations for the future

My recommendations on volunteering for the future are based on the 18 recommendations from the excellent evaluation report on the Sustaining Volunteering Initiative undertaken by the South West Community Capacity Consortium. I'll list them all in the content of this speech, but I will only focus on a few.

4.1 The List

1. That future Initiatives develop carefully contained aims, objectives and milestones that are feasible to achieve and measure through implementation. [Key Action]

2. That new Initiatives actively seek co-funding opportunities from across all levels of government, philanthropic organisation and business. [Key Action]
3. That future initiatives that have disparate models of governance clearly identify at their commencement, the roles, relationships and authority of each party, as well as a mechanism for conflict resolution between parties.
4. That future similar initiatives engage and involve an effective champion.
5. That a volunteer network that operates at a 'strategic level' and includes representation from local government, volunteer involving organisations and other interested stakeholders (e.g. corporations, not-for-profit groups) continues in South West Victoria.
6. That future initiatives employ a community capacity building approach similar to that of the SVI. [Key Action]
7. That future initiatives which depend on collaborative, functional partnerships adopt an ongoing strategic approach to monitoring the effectiveness of key partnerships. [Key Action]
8. That future initiatives that employ a community capacity building approach plan to also have several 'tangible' outcomes (or 'quick wins') that are apparent in the early stages of the initiative. [Key Action]
9. That future initiatives should involve LGAs on their Reference Group. [Key Action]

10. Funding models for regional projects need to include adequate resources to provide appropriate regional coverage, including staff based in numerous locations. [Key Action]
11. That future similar initiatives be highly selective in their choice of project staff.
12. That local governments in South West Victoria continue to consider how they can continue and expand their support for the volunteer sector in their municipalities. [Key Action]
13. That state and federal governments consider how they can better support local governments to sustain and build their volunteer sectors. [Key Action]
14. That future initiatives conduct formal research on their volunteer sector in the early stages of the project to establish a firm evidence base and develop relationships with stakeholders. [Key Action]
15. That funding provided to organisations for volunteer skills development and training in regional areas consider using the training framework developed through the SVI. [Key Action]
16. That a thorough evaluation of the use of the SWeVOLution website established by the Initiative be completed to determine if such a website is an effective tool for providing support to volunteers.
17. That the information and resources on the www.swvolunteerinitiative.org.au website continue to be updated and made available beyond the life of the SVI.
18. Consideration should be given to the feasibility of continuing projects identified by the SVI that are still in their early stages.

4.2. Priority Actions

That's quite a list. But may I choose just a few key points from that list to highlight what I see as priority actions for building a strong volunteering sector in the future. And building it through a strong and active partnership between the volunteering sector, all levels of government, philanthropic organisations, non-government agencies and business.

My priority actions include volunteer sector developing with governments:

- i. Clear areas / objectives and milestones for achievement and measurement.
- ii. Community capacity building for all participants in volunteering, e.g. governance, leadership, ethics, accountability, sustainability.
- iii. Building collaborative and effective partnerships with Councils, other volunteer organisations and non-government agencies, business and governments state and federal.
- iv. Establishing strategic representative volunteer networks at a regional and sub regional level with an emphasis on local government involvement and appropriate strategy funded by all three governments.
- v. Recognising and funding the need for action research projects, leadership, capacity building, etc sharing best practice in process and achievements.
- vi. Building through a partnership between governments, volunteer and non-government agencies; an effective communication system

including an interactive volunteering website which links the state and local level.

6. Conclusion

And finally we all need to define for ourselves and to be clear about the values and purposes that underpin our work as volunteers and community activists.

For me, I volunteer because like my parents, I believe that:

- People matter
- All people from all walks of life and all cultures deserve respect
- Those values are based on my passion, and my parents, for a socially inclusive society. It is a society in which no one is left behind and everyone has the right, the ability and the opportunity to shape their own futures and that of their community.

That philosophy is best summed up by a conversation that I had some years ago with an indigenous woman leader, Lillian Holt, on how we should celebrate the Centenary of Federation.

As Chair of the Centenary Advisory Committee for Prime Minister Paul Keating, I asked Lillian (and I was slightly embarrassed to ask at all) how we should celebrate the Centenary of Federation in 2001. She replied “We should talk about racism, because talking about racism is to begin the healing”.

“It is not talking about black versus white. It is about understanding that whatever diminishes me as a black woman, diminishes all women black or white. Understanding that, we can enhance humanity together.”

For me, that conversation sums up why I became a volunteer - a community activist. I hope to enhance humanity. I believe it is a vision we all share.

Thank you for listening. Thank you for your work and commitment. Best wishes for the Conference and beyond.