

Volunteering and ethnic peoples in New Zealand

1. This paper summarises issues identified by ethnic peoples as impacting on their 'volunteering' and 'fulfilment of cultural obligations'. The comments in this paper do not reflect government policy or the views of the Ministry of Social Development.
2. The issues were collected between September 2001 and June 2002, by the Volunteers and Volunteering Policy Project, a project led by the Ministry of Social Development (MSD). The issues were taken into account by MSD when developing advice to the government on volunteering in late 2002. (The project had been due to report in June 2002 but this was delayed due to the 2002 general election).

Consultation

3. A small number of responses were received from members of ethnic communities, during a consultation process for the project that was held from September to November 2001. Following this process the Ministry of Social Development officials held discussions with the Office of Ethnic Affairs and a small number of people from ethnic communities. The extent of consultation was too limited for ethnic communities' issues to be fully understood.

Conceptual and definitional differences in volunteering

4. 'Volunteering' is a concept that is not necessarily recognised by, or significant to, all cultures.
5. In keeping with international definitions the project defined volunteering using four key criteria, as follows:
 - a) The work is undertaken of one's own free will (it is not coerced, it is a matter of choice)
 - b) The work is unpaid (people may be reimbursed for expenses but this is not income)
 - c) The work is not for a person's immediate family (so volunteering does not include care of one's own children and maintenance of one's own home). [NB the project described this criteria as work that is outside one's own household]
 - d) The work benefits the common good (the work benefits other people, the community, and/or the environment).
6. There are grey areas in all the criteria. For example, in regard to the criteria of 'free will', the project team received comments from tangata whenua, Pacific and ethnic peoples that involvement in unpaid community activities are often undertaken more from a sense of obligation than 'free will'. In regard to the criteria of work not being for one's immediate family, there are cultural differences in how people define a family.
7. Volunteering is also sometimes described as being 'formal' or 'informal'. Formal volunteering takes place within an organisation (usually a non-profit or community organisation), and may involve a job description or

agreement between a volunteer and an organisation about respective obligations and responsibilities.

8. Informal volunteering is unstructured, unmanaged work one does as a friend, neighbour, relative or member of a community – helping out at the school fair, helping to paint a neighbour's roof, taking an elderly friend or neighbour to the doctor, or helping them with their shopping. Many, perhaps most people, would not think of themselves as a volunteer in this context – it is rather, an integral part of people's lives. It may be that the voluntary activity of people from some cultures in New Zealand is more often carried out informally.
9. The 'fulfilment of cultural obligations' (a term used alongside 'volunteering' by the project) is probably a reasonable complementary description of 'volunteering' for ethnic peoples, although this is based on limited opportunity for feedback from members of the ethnic community. '*Taking responsibility for the requirements of one's social grouping in a professional manner*' was one description of 'volunteering' that was passed on to the project.

Interpreting services

10. People with little or no English language skills can be reliant on other members of the community, including their children, to interpret for them. This may occur on a day-to-day informal basis. It also occurs in the interface people have with government agencies (e.g. Work and Income and Immigration), social service providers, medical professionals and schools. Members of the ethnic community who provide interpreting and translation services, or act as a 'cultural go-between' for a member of their community, usually do this work on an unpaid basis.
11. At times it can be unsatisfactory, even unethical, for a person to translate or interpret for someone they are closely associated with or related to. People often require confidential and impartial translation services. For example, it may not always be appropriate for a husband to translate on behalf of his wife if she is seeking professional advice on a medical matter. Children often provide translation services, which can be a burdensome responsibility for them.
12. Alongside ethical considerations, the reliance on voluntary interpreters in the health service raises a safety issue, as a practitioner may find accurate diagnoses difficult without an interpreter¹.
13. Government agencies should not assume that a member of the ethnic community will be available to interpret, and should consider making provisions to pay for interpreting services when these are required, or providing some other meaningful recognition to the interpreter.
14. Some volunteer interpreters would also like training to ensure they are working to appropriate standards.

¹ Research has been undertaken on this overseas. See *The Communication Gap*, Dr Rasalingham, NZ Federation of Ethnic Councils

15. People who provide unpaid interpreting and translation services may sometimes feel exploited. This illustrates that in seeking to 'enhance' volunteering, policy makers need to take into account that some people feel strongly that they should be paid for the services they are providing. Ethnic peoples feel that the issue of volunteer interpreters needs to be seen in a context of inadequate resourcing and ethnic peoples' right of access to services.

Supporting resettlement

16. People in ethnic communities spend considerable time supporting new members of their community. Some people feel that the work they are doing in this area goes 'beyond the call of duty', i.e. they are providing support that should be provided by government through resettlement programmes. Support provided by ethnic communities includes:

- provision and development of social networks
- supporting people to cope with discrimination
- finding and referring people to social or other services (housing, Work and Income, etc)
- assisting with cultural maintenance
- providing 'cultural induction' to New Zealand customs, values, etc
- assistance in finding paid work
- first contact for problems that arise.

17. Adequate provision of English language training for refugees and migrants relies on volunteers (e.g. through the ESOL Home Tutoring Service). Affordable and accessible English language training is a crucial resettlement issue for refugees and migrants.

Ethnic peoples volunteering in mainstream voluntary organisations

18. Formal volunteering can be an important avenue for refugees and migrants to:

- gain work experience
- become familiar with the New Zealand work environment
- practise their New Zealand English skills
- meet people outside their family and cultural group.

19. For those refugees and migrants who would like to participate in volunteering within mainstream organisations, there may be barriers which include:

- Some people who speak English as their first language respond with prejudice to people with limited oral and written English skills and different accents. It may be hard for these people to volunteer for community organisations if there are staff who are unwilling to make the effort with their own communication, or if communication with members of the public is required.

- Some voluntary organisations do not have the capacity to support refugee and migrant volunteers adequately and may therefore avoid involving them.
 - There may be cultural barriers for people wishing to work in a mono-cultural New Zealand workplace. For example, some women may not feel comfortable working alongside men, or their husbands may not wish them to do so.
 - Some refugees and migrants are unfamiliar with volunteering in a New Zealand context. Some people have suggested that there need to be workshops specifically for refugees and migrants to introduce volunteering to them.
 - Some organisations have bureaucratic and intimidating processes or an organisational culture that cannot accommodate cultural diversity, or deal with challenges to mono-cultural ways of doing things.
20. The potential for exploitation of refugees and migrants who volunteer may be exacerbated by cultural and language barriers. Some people may volunteer on the understanding that they will be gaining and developing useful skills and experience, but find they end up doing menial work instead. Refugees and migrants may benefit from assistance in negotiating agreements with organisations about respective responsibilities and expectations, and some sort of advocacy or mediation support when things go wrong.
21. Mainstream organisations may also benefit from advice on how to provide appropriate volunteering opportunities for ethnic peoples and any issues that may arise from involving volunteers from ethnic communities. For example, one community member commented that some migrants may have a different view of the acceptability of 'corruption', and may use a volunteering experience as an opportunity to access information or gain resources, in a manner that would be considered improper (and/or illegal) in New Zealand. The community member suggested that organisations need to be mindful of this kind of cultural difference.
22. Some ethnic migrants seeking paid work may be alarmed at the concept of volunteering, associating it with 'slave' labour. A principle of formal volunteering that is often promoted by volunteering advocates is that the volunteering experience should provide some benefits to the volunteer, e.g. skill development.
23. Where volunteers are beneficiaries it is important that they understand that there is no longer any compulsion by Work and Income to 'volunteer' for community services. They can, however, negotiate with their Work and Income case manager for their volunteering to be recognised in their job seeker agreements.
24. Refugees and migrants may benefit from assistance in finding volunteer positions. There are volunteering centres in various parts of New Zealand that can help people find volunteer opportunities. Some volunteering

centres provide information for organisations on how to involve and support volunteers.

Affordability of volunteering and financial support

25. People may find it difficult to afford the costs involved in volunteering and fulfilling their cultural obligations; e.g. transport, car parking, childcare, lunch, photocopying and printing. Some people may also lose wages if they are required to take time off during the day.
26. In some formal volunteering situations, expenses to a volunteer should be reimbursed, if at all possible. This would include reimbursing the cost of people who attend government-run consultation processes.
27. Cultural obligations to do unpaid work can interrupt some ethnic people's paid work. Many ethnic peoples have extended families obligations, e.g. an elderly parent or grandparent falls ill and needs to be nursed. The responsibility for this care-giving usually falls on the daughter or daughter-in-law at home. This can lead to difficulties for the daughter or daughter-in-law if she is seeking full time employment.
28. Employers can also be unsympathetic to requests for paid leave or even unpaid leave for any extended periods of time, although good employers are more responsive.