

Briefing for the new Minister for the Voluntary Sector Hon. Tariana Turia

Definition of Volunteering

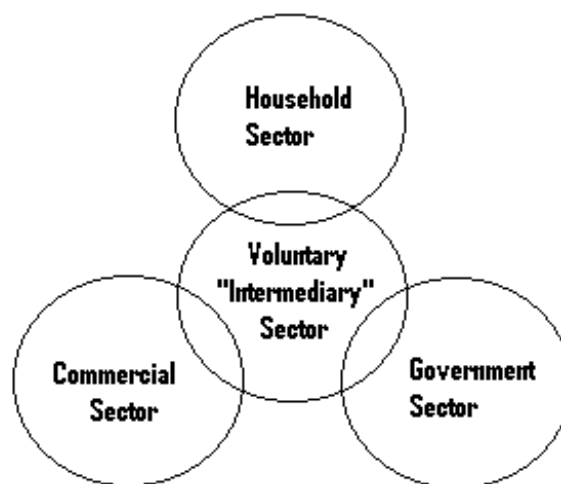
The definition of voluntary work being upheld by members of Volunteering New Zealand (VNZ) is that it is done of one's own free will, unpaid, for the common good.

To be a voluntary activity there should be no coercion involved, for example, from peer/family pressure or statutory regulation. The activity should also not be for personal benefit (financial or similar). It should benefit a wider group but also be for the good of society generally. Upholding the integrity of volunteering requires close attention to this definition. The VNZ constitution to which all its members are committed reflects the vision, beliefs and values that underpin this definition.

While volunteering must avoid coercion, people nevertheless often feel a strong sense of responsibility, even obligation in their volunteering. Doing something of one's own free will is different from doing something simply as a matter of choice.

Volunteering in Sectors

Volunteering can occur in any sector of the community. "The Community" actually includes everyone – whanau/hapu/iwi, the government sector (central, regional and local), the business and commercial sector, the voluntary sector and the household sector.



Hilkka Pietila

The government sector, for example, relies on volunteers in areas such as the Conservation Department, the Fire Service, schools, libraries, and so forth. In the business sector there are 'employee volunteers'. All volunteers come from the household sector. They volunteer with and for their family, for example, on the PTA, helping at Kindergarten, sports coaching etc. There are also communities of interest and of locality between the different sectors. Many people volunteer with and for their whanau, hapu and iwi. Work on relationships between the above sectors (see model), and whanau, hapu, iwi structures, is being explored in Treaty based developments. For example, the definition of Volunteering has been given expression in Maori as aroha ki te takata a rohe by the local Tribal Council, Te Runaka ki Otautahi o Kai Tahu. This is a

result of the working relationship between Volunteering Canterbury and Te Runaka. It was given in the context of commitment to the vision, values and beliefs of Volunteering New Zealand.

Maori and Volunteering

The concept of “volunteering” as understood in contemporary society had no direct equivalent in the Maori traditional world. Voluntary activity – acts of service to the people of the whanau, hapu and iwi – was seen as an expression of the Maori philosophical cornerstones of collective consciousness, well-being, and responsibility. Maori structures of whanau, hapu, and iwi add another dimension. Treaty based relationships such as those between Te Runaka and Volunteering Canterbury give a framework for further work on Volunteering (or whatever emerges as the term as these relationships develop).

Naming the Sector

It would be helpful if the word “community” was not used to refer to the Voluntary Sector. Putting community/voluntary together draws attention away from the key elements of what Volunteering means, and can cause confusion about the meaning of Volunteering. Another issue lies in referring to the Voluntary Sector as the “third” sector. This is inaccurate (at least historically) as it is really the “FIRST” sector, having been there before either government or business! It is useful, however, to name the voluntary sector as the “third” in relation to levels of power in that Commerce and Government are now always more powerful. Recognition that the Voluntary Sector has less power needs emphasis so that its role in creating new services (which may be better taken over by Government or Commerce) and in responding to injustice highlights the particular quality of the Voluntary Sector as “intermediary”.

The Voluntary Sector and Volunteering

The last Census and the 1999 Time Use Survey demonstrate that New Zealand is a country of Volunteers. In the four weeks before the census 1.1 million of us did some form of unpaid work outside the household. While unpaid work is not always the same as Volunteering (e.g. slavery is unpaid work) there would be value in expanding the Survey to discern the impact of volunteering or lack of it on all sectors (government, commerce, household, voluntary) as well as on whanau, hapu and iwi.

Volunteering occurs across all sectors, and whanau, hapu, and iwi. Volunteering projects in, for example, Arts/Heritage/Tourism may be located in the Government (local, regional, central), Commerce/Business, Household or Voluntary sectors or in whanau, hapu, iwi. These projects may also be in other areas such as the Environment, Social Services and Health, Sport and Recreation, Emergency Services, and Education/Information

A growing trend in Volunteering is involvement by employees or employers. This is being referred to in various ways, for example, Employee Volunteering, Employee Community Involvement, and Corporate Volunteering. It needs to be seen as offering employees work experience in a Sector that is distinct from that of their employment – in a project or organisation in the Voluntary sector. Some will take up the option by company agreement within office hours, others in their own free time but with company support for the project of their involvement.

Conclusion

The major concern for Volunteering is to maintain its independence and integrity across all sectors, so that it is not taken over to serve only the interests of the household, commercial and/or government sectors. It cannot be emphasised enough that all sectors need to understand and respect the definition of

Volunteering. In addition, by working together in a spirit of co-operation, understanding and respect will be enhanced across the sectors.

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