



# Once upon a time...

STORIES ABOUT VOLUNTEERS  
AND VOLUNTEERING



**Volunteer Wellington**  
A CATALYST FOR COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

# Introduction

When people volunteer they move into the unknown. They become agents for a better world. Sometimes the impact of this experience is a surprise – sometimes they already have an expectation and some knowledge of what they are heading for. But one thing is for sure, whether they're volunteering as a stepping stone to paid employment, or they're taking off out of the house for a while, or they're passionate about a cause, they never forget the experience.

Besides changing the world, volunteers are promoters and marketers for the voluntary sector because they have participated and been involved. Therefore they are a workforce with which to be reckoned.

These stories are a tribute to the people who take these risks and step into the unknown; as well as the not-for-profit agencies with whom they work.

Hundreds of stories come our way during the year. Occasionally we manage to combine all the forces which make a story visible – arranging an interview and having a photographer on hand, taking notes, writing and then passing on this material to our graphic designer. We are grateful to the people who have been part of that forceful combination.

## **Volunteer Wellington**

January 2007

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SIMON WILSON

## Volunteering builds confidence

**PING PING PAN** migrated to New Zealand with her husband and young son in 2000. Her volunteering career step as an interviewer with **Volunteer Wellington** began during 2003 while in her third year at Victoria University studying accounting and commercial law.

Prior to this move Ping Ping spent eight years teaching English in a small town North of Beijing. Her husband, who worked with a family business, had heard that New Zealand was 'a beautiful place' during a work sojourn in Switzerland. It was not difficult to convince his family that a small country in the Pacific would be a good place to live and work.

However Ping Ping found that, once here, communicating with locals and understanding a totally different cultural, social and work environment was 'very difficult'.

She decided to volunteer. Her potential was quickly recognised during the **Volunteer Wellington** interview process. Ping Ping was happy, not to take on a role in the

financial field (her area of expertise) but to focus on a voluntary job which demanded highly competent communication ability. The training was intense and required repeated observation of other interviewers at work, database knowledge ... and a sense of the many community organisations who are members of **Volunteer Wellington**.

This is perhaps the part of her volunteering career that Ping Ping enjoys most; finding the right role with the right organisation for the right person. For example, she was excited during the early weeks of her volunteering, to find that a young Japanese student with minimal English was a Rugby fan. 'I referred her to two sports agencies on our database, and one was a Rugby Club. Volunteering is the most positive way of finding out about the lives of many New Zealanders. And about their work in the community.'

Ping Ping added that she was 'impressed and moved' by the numbers of young, highly qualified people with very good jobs whom she has interviewed in order to find

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**'The community sector helped me to understand New Zealand.'**

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SIMON WILSON

volunteering roles. 'Their reasons are to help people have a better life. They choose organisations such as those committed to refugees, or people with disabilities, prison rehabilitation, literacy.'

Her future will be in the finance and business arena but she will never forget her work with communities. 'They are the ones who have helped me to understand New Zealand.' ■



KATRINA CHING

## Stepping stones to finding a career path

**HAMISH HINKLEY** decided to have time off from University after doing papers at Dunedin and Victoria. The 24-year-old from Waikanae needed 'time to think', and during this phase he realised he had a desire to move in a completely new direction: teaching secondary school English.

With this end in mind, Hamish wanted to explore the practical side of teaching; have a taste of what it is all about. Giving volunteering a go was his next step. To make this happen he organised an interview with **Volunteer Porirua** who matched his skills, credentials and motivations with the many volunteering opportunities listed on their comprehensive database.

Hamish chose SCIL – School Community Iwi Liaison – an organisation dedicated to working in a mentoring/one-to-one capacity with students from a number of schools in the Porirua basin. He took on three 13 to 14-year-old students – Zac, James and Matthew. All were in some way disadvantaged from an educational point-of-view.

'I learnt how to use the PPP (pause, prompt, praise) teaching method. After the pause it's extremely interesting to see how students come to their own conclusions. Then it's easy to do the praise bit.'

He added that the work had been rewarding and enjoyable. 'It's really shown me something about the basics of teaching – how to communicate with young students.'

Jean Shortland is the co-ordinator of SCIL. She described how quickly a bond had developed between Hamish and his students. 'He came regularly three times a week and if something cropped up and he couldn't come, he would always let us know.'

After six months of valuable work, Hamish is planning for a return to university. 'We don't want Hamish to go,' was the students' first reaction when they heard this news. But as a result of his relaxed yet focused tutoring they are now happier about school in general. They are also pleased to know they are part of Hamish Hinkley's new-found determination to become a secondary school teacher. ■

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‘It's really shown me something about the basics of teaching – how to communicate with young students.’

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KATRINA CHING



SIMON WILSON

## Mitul's double entendre career

**MITUL PATEL** has a Bachelor of Science degree and a Masters degree in Human Resources from M.S. University of Baroda in Gujarat. After a couple of years in India working as a manufacturing chemist and later as a human resources officer, he came to New Zealand, encouraged by his sister, in September 2002.

'New Zealand is a place to have a peaceful, happy life,' he believes. However, the work front has been a chequered experience. Pak n'Save and now Woolworths have been his means of earning an income. Flexible late afternoon work hours have enabled him to keep on volunteering for **Volunteer Wellington**.

Mitul finds that his role as an interviewer has given him a 'Kiwi experience in my own field'. Being part of the **Volunteer Wellington** team has also meant he can

'make the network and build a proper group. Here I can be myself so people can know me and I can find out about them. When we are new to this country we want people to know what sort of person we are.'

This can be difficult on the check-out counter. Now Mitul wants to motivate other people to volunteering through **Volunteer Wellington**. 'We really do things here for the best result possible,' he says. 'Not just referring and forgetting. After interviewing we will ring and say how is it going? Is that referral working?'

While his Supermarket career continues, Mitul is determined to maintain his other career in volunteering. An interesting balance of paying the rent and stimulating the mind. ■

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**'Volunteering has given me a Kiwi experience in my own field.'**

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SIMON WILSON



ALAN WICKENS

## Volunteering – a positive step

**ANNE WILKINSON** is, in the jargon of current day parlance, a ‘change agent’. As she candidly says ‘I’ve moved out of my comfort zones several times. The risks have been scary but the benefits rewarding.’

After changing roles with her husband when their children were small, Anne returned to the full-time workforce for around 20 years. She worked with accounts, factory administration and management.

Then, craving intellectual stimulus, she became a full-time student with the Open Polytechnic, managing on a student allowance and part-time work. A Bachelor Degree in Applied Science and Psychology was the result of those hard-working years, with much of that time spend studying and completing assignments ‘by myself at night-time’.

After a phase of ill health for both Anne and her husband she is again ready for action. ‘I want my life back,’ she now says.

The pattern of her new life fits around care-giving – and consequently school hours – for her active young grand-child; and interviewing potential volunteers

with **Volunteer Porirua**. ‘I came here (**Volunteer Porirua**) seeking a voluntary role for stimulus, to have some structure in my day – and to work with people.’

The world of academia is fascinating and a love of learning is still with her, says Anne, but she feels now there is a need to be in touch with what people are thinking and wanting out of their lives. Explaining and discussing the various volunteering options with those seeking roles with Porirua community groups is giving her this ‘hands-on, and very local’ experience and knowledge.

‘I am making the most of my present situation because as an interviewer at the Volunteer Porirua office I’m meeting different people with different motivations all the time. The learning is coming from a different perspective and much of it is about just how much there is out there in the way of support and adding quality to people’s lives.’

She adds that the ‘real work’ aspect of volunteering is a positive step, while she is a Work & Income recipient, towards moving into paid employment. ■

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‘I’ve moved out of my comfort zones several times. The risks have been scary but the benefits rewarding.’

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ALAN WICKENS



ALAN WICKENS

## Volunteering extends skills during career crossroads

**MICHELLE WALMSLEY**'s interest in history began during high school days in Hawkes Bay, but it was when she came to Victoria University that her focus grew and developed. She stayed with history, adding political science and including gender and sexuality perspectives.

After her Honours degree she worked as a staff member with disability support services and for a couple of years was a tutor in media studies at Victoria. 'University made me,' Michelle says, revisiting in this interview, those years of study. 'And Wellington is a great city. It's compact and easy to wheel from one end to the other.'

Michelle's permanent mode of getting around is a wheelchair. Therefore proximity and access are all important.

Before university and her subsequent work with disability services, Michelle felt disassociated from the sector. 'There was a stigma surrounding disability which I didn't want to be part of.'

But now she is more focussed on groups associated with disability and the issues involved, and states: 'I'm proud of my identity as a person with a disability.'

A key obstacle in the equal opportunities field is employment, and for this energetic, keenly intelligent young woman those in-between-jobs times – transitions – can be trying and frustrating.

At a crossroads in her career progression, Michelle wants to use this time in transition actively and well. Volunteering as an interviewer twice a week with **Volunteer Wellington** is keeping up her motivation and adds structure to her week. She is quick to say too, that the busier one is the easier it is to take on more responsibility and extend one's skill set.

She also recognises that she is currently developing a good CV, meeting an amazing array of people and is now more likely to find interesting, sustainable employment in the field of her choice – political analysis. ■

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**'I am now more likely to find interesting, sustainable employment in the field of my choice – political analysis.'**

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ALAN WICKENS



JAI ME HAYDEN

## Keen to give back

**CHRIS TINDALL's** dad organized junior cricket. Chris enjoyed what he was given as a young enthusiast. Now, as a parent with three young boys aged between a few weeks and 14 years, he is keen to give back 'what we got and better'.

His father believed that volunteering builds strong communities – especially through sport. This role model stands him in good stead today, as much of what Chris Tindall does professionally in his 'day job' can be applied to the challenges involved with amateur sport, and in particular junior events.

An example he gives is that as Chair/Manager and coach of the Horewhenua Kapiti Junior Cricket Club, he was involved with six junior rep teams who played in eight tournaments during the Christmas break with a funding requirement of more than 19 thousand dollars. 'New balls, uniforms, moving from a to b – it's all very expensive.' That's a lot of money for a club to find from charitable institutions but – with 'good organization' – it was achieved.

Chris, who lives in Paraparaumu, is Contracts Manager with the New Zealand Rugby Union. He employs players, coaches and referees, all

at Super 14 level. It's a role which demands precision, decisiveness but most of all 'good organization'.

That's what Chris now brings to his multi-faceted volunteering roles. 'Being organized and getting others involved are the keys to keeping junior sport alive and well.' He admits he's taken on a load of responsibility and that every Sunday of the summer is about cricket. But his 14-year-old is keen and is certainly getting what his father got from his father. 'And the little fellow (he's three) is tagging along too.'

And from the viewpoint of professional rugby, Chris is well aware of the need to keep junior sport levels high nationally; this can only happen with intense parental and other volunteer support, he says.

Chris manages to keep a lot of organizational balls in the air. 'I get small committees to take on specific tasks which minimizes the need for meetings where we sit around not doing much and taking too long to make decisions. People are good at taking on jobs when they're asked. This way the load is spread effectively and the more people you have involved the more institutional knowledge is being acquired. This is all part of succession planning

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**'Being organized and getting others involved are the keys to keeping junior sport alive and well.'**

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JAI ME HAYDEN

– another key to the survival of successful amateur sports clubs.'

He emphasizes that without this groundswell of involvement there is a spiralling down of club spirit, leaving no core from which to create the confidence and enthusiasm which is needed to make the whole thing enjoyable. And at the end of a hard day's cricket, that's what it's all about: not losing sight of the vision to have Horewhenua Kapiti representation, firstly as a Central Districts representative player and then as a Black Cap. ■





ELINA LI

## Well armed for a future in social work

**SONYA FORD** is a second year Massey University student working towards a Bachelor of Social Work. She is also a sole parent with a son of almost six years.

‘As a beneficiary I have appreciated Work & Income’s encouragement and support with my studies. I am now looking forward to a career as a social worker. My passion is to work with prisoners and be involved in good rehabilitation programmes.’

Sonya came to **Volunteer Wellington** seeking the practical experience required by her course. She took on the role of interviewing and further positions as a promotional agent to students at both International Student Orientation expos and Careers Fairs organised by Victoria University throughout the year.

At the time of this interview she had completed the 50 hours necessary for a work placement. ‘But I am enjoying the work so much and learning all the time, that as long as I can fit in volunteering with my studies, I shall continue.’

Through her weekly interviewing sessions she has learnt to work with the many variations of human behaviour – including unpredictability; good preparation for the social work field, she says.

‘Also I have learnt to analyse myself and be able to respond to difficult situations in a more balanced way than I would have done in my earlier jobs. I realize too, the depth and the levels of support available in the community.’ This knowledge has come about because of discussion she has with each person she interviews about possible volunteering roles which come up on the database with any one of **Volunteer Wellington’s** 350 plus community organisation members.

But Sonya’s most impassioned comment about her volunteering experience was ‘there are so many beautiful people out there’. She agrees she is definitely being well armed with optimism and positive energy for her future career. ■

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‘I realize now, the depth and the levels of support available in the community.’

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ELINA LI



JOHN SAVAGE

## World of possibilities opens up

**TODD IRVING** has thoroughly enjoyed most of the jobs he has turned his hand to during past decade. Labouring, building, fencing – but at the age of 20 he decided he wanted to put something back into the community. His decision was to become a volunteer.

Another change of direction in recent months has been ‘to get into art’. And he has always liked riding and horses. So Todd’s two major keywords when interviewed through **Volunteer Wellington**, were art and animals. A couple of interesting voluntary roles came up on the database – a youth art group known as Artsy Links and Riding For The Disabled. Enthusiastic Todd took on them both.

As he lives in Tawa, Todd had often driven past the paddocks used for the disabled riding project. ‘Wow, they’re nice horses,’ he’d say to himself, never imagining there would come a time when he would be working there on a regular basis.

Since his interview, which opened up this world of volunteering possibilities, he goes to Riding For The Disabled every Tuesday. His tasks are to groom and care for the horses. The next stage of his training will be assisting the riders who come

regularly to ride and, as Todd put it, ‘experience the joy of their own strength’.

He adds that riding gives these people with varying forms of disability a new confidence about life. ‘When they overcome their fear and ride the horse they are building something lovely.’

His Artsy Links involvement has taken him to a couple of artspace where he has learnt some of the detail about the aims of these organisations. One was a Pacific exhibition at Victoria University’s Adam Art Gallery; the other a guided tour around Vincents Art Space in central Wellington. With this information Todd is now in a position to take his own networks of friends and, in turn, give them a guided tour. Other visits to galleries and museums will continue to happen throughout 2004.

A further string to Todd’s bow is completing a computer course organised by SF – Supporting Families – an organisation dedicated to ensuring people on various sickness benefits are given opportunities to be successfully involved with community life. ■

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‘When they ride they experience the joy of their own strength.’

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JOHN SAVAGE



## We foodbank workers talk and encourage and hope

**JUNE** has seen many changes in people and society during her 15 years with the Upper Hutt Foodbank. 'Take one young woman who came in one year 20 times for food parcels. We workers talk and encourage and hope. And yes, this young woman did turn around and now she has a law degree – and a good job!'

As the Upper Hutt Foodbank was set up a couple of decades ago 'to provide emergency food and referral for the underprivileged in Upper Hutt', this dramatic life-change illustrates the value of June's words.

Sometimes, she went on to say, the advice may be as simple as 'how about sprucing yourself up and then you're very likely to get a job.' At other times it's budget advice or suggesting another visit to Work and Income to talk things through. And again there are the times when it is just being there and accepting someone's present situation ... which is the need for a food parcel.

However, all Foodbank workers have detailed knowledge of the organisations offering different

services around the Hutt Valley. Information (and especially contact details), when given in an informal and friendly way, goes a long way in taking a person in distress to another chapter in their lives.

June has always been part of helping/caring organisations; but she emphasises, quite stridently, that this does not mean feeling sorry for people. 'You can't be a wet blanket.'

Objectivity is the essence of the Foodbank service; as is watching societal trends and being gently encouraging while at the same time sensitive to people's needs.

June, who has lived in Upper Hutt for 50 odd years, fits many interests into her busy week. There is her weekly appointment with the Foodbank and there are also regular pottery classes, a beautiful garden which demands ongoing care and attention – and 11 grandchildren.

In this well-balanced line-up of activities, June says it's her grandchildren who are the most

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‘ You can't be a wet blanket. ’

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outspoken about saying they would like to do more things with their grandmother. 'So I intend to finish up here (at the Foodbank) by the time I'm 80.' That is still three years away so June has plenty of time to plan her future. ■



KATRINA CHING

## Learning from the locals

**SIVAPATHASUNDARAM SITHAMPARAPPILLAI**, AKA Siva, is a father, a retiree, a Sri Lankan, a Hindu, a business student, a New Zealand resident; and he is also a volunteer.

After working for almost 40 years in management situations with government departments in Sri Lanka, he came to New Zealand a couple of years ago, after the death of his wife, to be closer to his children who had already settled here.

But his arrival 'in this beautiful country' was just the beginning of a new and, as it has turned out, eventful journey. Among the numerous trials to be overcome was understanding the assertive behaviour expected of employers in this country when going for a job interview. 'In my homeland applicants must be deferential,' Siva says.

Although a competent English speaker he was also surprised at his difficulty in understanding the Kiwi accent and style of speaking. So Siva's first experience of the voluntary sector was as a student attending social English classes organised by the Hutt ESOL Home Tutors.

Having gained confidence from his ESOL tuition, he is now studying a National Diploma of Business at Weltech. This positive experience as a recipient of volunteering skills then led him to seek volunteering roles himself.

'During my leisure hours I wanted to do some service for my new country and for humanity.'

Through **Volunteer Hutt** he has found some challenging volunteering assignments. First up, he regularly helped out at IHC's Arthouse in Petone. Involvement with Habitat for Humanity followed, and now he is back at ESOL's Home Tutoring service – but this time as a tutor.

'I am teaching English to new settlers who are weak in English, especially those from Sri Lanka.' His current student is an 85-year-old grandmother.

Siva talks about how volunteering has helped him integrate into the local Lower Hutt community but he is adamant that retaining one's own culture and language is also important. In order to support children from Sri Lankan families living in New Zealand, he tutors in the Tamil School every Saturday. 'Don't forget your mother tongue,' he advises new settlers.

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**'Volunteering is a way of communicating about the way of life in New Zealand.'**

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KATRINA CHING

Whether he is tutoring in English to an 85-year-old woman from Sri Lanka, or Tamil to young children born in New Zealand but from Sri Lankan families, or helping out with art workshops with IHC students, Siva says that volunteering is more than just gaining experience. 'It's a way of communicating about the way of life in New Zealand.' ■

STORY JENNIFER MCRAE



KATRINA CHING

## Student placement creates confident development worker

**CORAZON GAWÉ** completed a Diploma of Development Studies from Victoria University at the end of 2005. She is from a northern island in the Philippines, has a village background and is from the indigenous group known as Kan-Kan-Ey.

When interviewed by **Volunteer Wellington** she was about to return, with her husband and three children, to her home island. 'It's a hub of NGOs – this is where I want to work, especially since I have had my placement experience with **Volunteer Wellington**.'

Included in her learning schedule was a community placement requiring 140 hours of on-the-job work. Corazon (also known as Corey) found out about **Volunteer Wellington** while she was at a swimming pool with children reading the community advertisements in a local newspaper.

This led to an interviewing role with **Volunteer Wellington**: 'Much more interesting than I ever imagined; and always inspiring to know that

there are people eager to give their time and their skills. I was very impressed with this willingness to share. It's given me a great sense of this generous side of New Zealand.'

She also enjoyed the diversity of people who were seeking volunteering roles. 'Some people need to feel included in society, have someone to talk to. Others want to befriend someone with the need to talk. Another group who work full-time wanted to give back to society. They were often highly qualified – their skills will add much to a number of groups.'

'And then there were many who, like me, want experience. Interviewing is very rewarding and if I did ever come back to New Zealand and work full-time, I feel this would be something I could do for the rest of my life.'

Corey completed more than 60 hours of interviewing in her weeks with **Volunteer Wellington**. She is a great example of a bright student energizing an organisation's work team.

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**'And then there are many who, like me, want experience.'**

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KATRINA CHING

Corey's 60 hours represent 60 new volunteers going out into the voluntary sector armed with information and a good interviewer's infectious enthusiasm.

Such work, even if short-term, is invaluable. ■



## Building capacity wherever it's needed

**ISHBEL MCWHA's** interest in poverty issues was triggered in the course of her studies majoring in psychology and international relations. Later post-graduate work, with industrial psychology as a main focus, finally took her into the voluntary workplace.

Her thesis had covered aspects of how to 'market poverty' in order for understanding and awareness to develop, and for genuine capacity building to result. So her first workplace was appropriate: for nine months she was a programme officer with a local NGO in Jaipur, India.

Ishbel had already worked with the British High Commission in Wellington for a couple of years before this field experience in order to save the money which would enable her to volunteer for such a long time in an Indian town

'In Jaipur I was in charge of creating new projects and raising the profile of the work being done,' she said. 'The organisation was mainly concerned with the empowerment of women and children's education and health.'

After her return to New Zealand she quickly found work with the Department of Labour in the immigration section. 'But my heart was in supporting local NGOs to build their capacity. It's rewarding work and seemed to have made my studies worthwhile.'

Within the precincts of a government department – air-conditioned and all – she found she was missing the people contact and the different cultures she had been working with in India. She came to **Volunteer Wellington** and took up the role of after-hours interviewing, mainly talking to people in full-time employment who were seeking a volunteering position that would fit into their lives and time-frames.

This worked as a stop-gap for Ishbel ... 'a holding bay before finding another international volunteering position in a third world country.' At the time of this interview Ishbel was about to carry out her last interview with **Volunteer Wellington** before leaving in a couple of weeks for a capacity-building position with an NGO in Cambodia, found through Australia Volunteers International.

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**‘ My heart is in supporting local NGOs to build their capacity. It seemed to have made my studies worthwhile. ’**

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A new language to be learnt, a new culture with whom to work. But whether her volunteering is here in Wellington or much further afield, Ishbel McWha will continue to make a difference. Like all volunteers, she is changing the world. ■



SIMON WILSON

## Volunteering, silk scarves and walking the dog

**JIM COLLINS** completed his Masters in economics in 1967. The next phase of his career began with the New Zealand Forest Service, sparking off an interest in the economics of developing countries and communities. How resources, labour and capital could work together to bring about 'balanced development' has become a life-long interest and study.

A position with the Commerce Commission followed with this experience leading to the establishment of his own business, advising on trade practises' law. 'A fiscal interest emerged,' he says today, 'relating to how this country will manage the implications of the currently ageing population.'

'It's more than just a superannuation discussion. It's the huge waste of the human resource; and the reality of people in their 50s and over, finding it more and more difficult to find work.'

Jim's interest in research took him to the Mature Employment Service where he 'number crunched' statistics pertaining to the rising rate of unemployment (and non-

participation in the workforce) among the older age group. Three major reasons rose to the surface and were discussed by Jim in an article he wrote for *NZ Business* in 1998 and entitled Why We Must Keep The Baby Boomers working...

- Prejudice
- Inadequate retraining
- Limited economic growth

But during the intervening years Jim Collins has come up with some answers; and which now, as someone approaching 60 and determined to be a fully participating member of society, he applies to his own multi-faceted lifestyle.

In order to remain involved and aware Jim volunteered for some months as an interviewer at **Volunteer Wellington**. This role provided him with a knowledge of the 300 plus community organisations continually seeking a skilled voluntary workforce and who, in the main, offer comprehensive training and networking possibilities. 'Wonderful opportunities for ensuring mental, emotional and physical health for those in the older age group,' says Jim. He now works as a

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**'What more could a man want ... after all a happy person makes for a happy community.'**

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SIMON WILSON

volunteer adviser with the organisation promoting pre-retirement schemes and establishing partnerships between businesses and **Volunteer Wellington**. 'Experience counts, skills last' is the catch phrase.

On the paid employment front he continues to run his economic consultancy and he also organises, from home, an importing business selling silks from Vietnam and cashmere clothes and other items, from Mongolia. And he has a young, energetic dog which requires vigorous walking four times a day. ■



## Volunteering keeps her well

**HEATHER CHILDS** has lived with a mental illness since her early teens. In her own words she says 'I know my disability quite well by now. I know what works and what doesn't.'

She goes on to say: 'I look at my disability like I had a broken leg. You break it, it heals, it leaves the leg slightly weaker so you're more likely to look after it and acknowledge there are certain things you can't do.'

'I work as a volunteer with an Upper Hutt community organisation called BEST – Benefit Education Service Trust. I am the receptionist and I have worked three days a week for two years. If I didn't have this voluntary job I would probably have ended up back in hospital well before now. My job gives me structure for the day and week. I know I need to get up at 7.30 am, dress, have breakfast and be outside by 9 am to be picked up for work.'

'I use this volunteering work for a variety of reasons. I get to talk to lots of different people in person and over the phone. I have certain tasks to perform during the day. Answering phones keep me alert and motivated and I use my job to keep me well because I'm interacting with other staff members.'

'We have a good laugh and I enjoy doing it. I'm part of something good and healthy. This keeps me happy and a functioning member of the community workforce.'

'I realize now I couldn't function without my job. If I stay at home I become bored and depressed and get into a rut. Things go on in my head and I start to spiral downwards. I need this work to stay on top of my mental illness.'

'There is a stigma if you have a mental illness. It's the secret that can't be shared because of others' attitudes. But I like to take opportunities – like now – to help educate people about mental illness. I have been an active member of the Rimutaka Lions for three years but only recently have shared information about my disability with others. The remarks have been "really, we wouldn't have known!"'

Heather has now added a couple of new interests to her life: these are riding her natty new bike, being a member of weight-watchers and, now that she has had two years of practice in a properly structured volunteering position, next year she intends looking for full-time paid employment. ■

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**'The secret that can't be shared.'**

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KATRINA CHING

## Volunteering opens doors

**ROC HUANG** came to New Zealand in 2001 from Xiamen China, where he had previously received a B.S. in Electronic Commerce. What attracted him to New Zealand, he claims, was his desire to acquire 'more opportunities for the future'. These opportunities have now come to mean increased fluency in English and volunteering through **Volunteer Wellington**.

After a year at Canterbury University, Roc moved to Wellington where he is studying Information Systems at Victoria University.

One of his first moves when he came to Wellington was a visit to **Volunteer Wellington** to find out about volunteering opportunities. 'I had a lot of academic knowledge in my head but not many chances to speak in an everyday way.'

When he became an interviewer for **Volunteer Wellington** his exposure to a foreign culture was maximised. With returning back home in mind, Roc explained that this experience will also help him to start work at a higher position when he goes back to China.

He has found interviewing interesting and enjoys exchanging stories with interviewees. 'Often they become good friends. And I have certainly learnt how to communicate effectively in English.'

Roc is an active member of the Victoria University Christian Club and has taken on other volunteering roles as well. Besides website research for the NZ Federation of Ethnic Councils and becoming a cyber deputy with **Volunteer Wellington's** IT team, he also gives regular support to a refugee family. 'I was given helpful support from Kiwis when I first came here. I've enjoying doing the same for some others.'

When this interview took place he was about to take his family for a weekend visit to Te Papa.

Roc plans to complete his Masters by 2007 before returning to China to find a job. He hopes that a new confidence in his ability to speak English and his growing ease in communicating with others from all sorts of backgrounds will help pave his way to a successful career when he returns to China. ■

STORY ERIN MCMYNE

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‘ Since I’ve been a volunteer interviewer I am easier in my communication in English with others from all sorts of backgrounds.’

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KATRINA CHING



## Strategic thinking: a way of life

**BOUTROS NAM**, from the town of Wau in Bahral-al-Ghazal in Southern Sudan, came to New Zealand via a refugee camp in Kenya in 2000. His story is one of success in the midst of unrest and adversity; and discovering that good things come out of giving whole-heartedly to other people.

He completed his studies as a lawyer in Khartoum in 1994, but his family advised leaving the country when his town was surrounded and many civilians were killed.

Upper Hutt, home to about 200 other Sudanese people, was Boutros's first home in New Zealand. Immediately, he became involved with the fledgling Sudanese community group. Holiday programmes were organised, a study centre at Upper Hutt College, and more recently Boutros has been instrumental in ensuring that a Sudanese community development officer be employed at St Joseph's School. 'The reason for this role is to find solutions to issues before they grow – to support students throughout their schooling rather than when it is too late and they've dropped out – or fallen out.'

During his first year in New Zealand he studied International Relations at Victoria University and at the end of 2001 achieved his first Masters

Degree. Further study followed a couple of years later resulting in yet another Masters – this is his LLM.

Boutros Nam is a positive and strategic thinker. Applying his new knowledge, learning about the local community, establishing new networks, but above all being able to support his fellow countrypeople, were his next major objectives. Through Volunteer Hutt he found out about BEST (Benefit Education Services Trust) in Upper Hutt and become an advocate for people from his community.

'I had the languages so I could help people who needed to understand better the Work & Income system; as well as health and education services and resources. I was given great training and my voluntary work was of value to many people.'

Boutros then spent a year working voluntarily with Refugee & Migrant Services, covering greater Wellington. 'This maximised my scope and enabled me to have contact with different refugee groups, as well as government ministries.' He sums up this 'incredibly valuable' time of giving to the community as being able to 'get out and get known' adding that 'it's not good to be at home all the time if you are unemployed.'

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**'I was given great training and my voluntary work was of value to many people.'**

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Inevitably Boutros Nam became very well known and in 2006 he was offered full-time work as a Research Project Advisor with the Ministry of Social Development. But he is not one to forget the communities with whom he has been so inextricably involved. Besides still having an active role with ChangeMakers Refugee Forum, Boutros's after-work commitment is to write the history of human rights injustices in Sudan since the outbreak of civil war. 'The rest of the world needs to know.' ■



## Volunteering uses left side of brain

**CATHY EGAN** was a teacher for 14 years before she established her own business, Life Worx Learning. The services she offered consisted of personality assessment and appropriate training, life coaching and other facets of adult education.

Cathy has always been the sort of woman who demanded challenges of herself; she had a comprehensive skill set; she did things well. The onset of multiple sclerosis five years ago has forced her to think out a different set of priorities and 'go more slowly'.

Hard at first, she admits today, 'and there were moments when I could have begun to feel sorry for myself. Then I'd look out the window of my home in Thorndon and see Mt Crawford prison in the distance and realize that even if I can't drive now, even if I have to go slower, I am luckier than someone with only a concrete wall to look at. I can go out.'

And it is going out which now has so much significance for Cathy Egan.

Although her business has shrunk since the onset of MS, Cathy has filled the gaps with new challenges. Among these is volunteering.

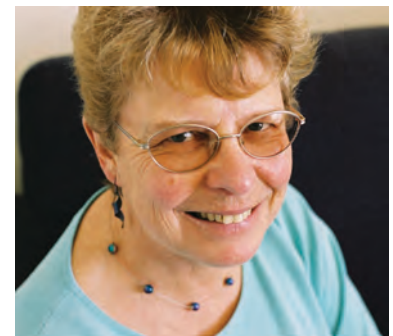
The paid work she continues to do (even to the extent of being driven to and from her workplace in the Hutt Valley by a keen employer) is tutoring women carrying out skills development through TOPS courses. Her aim is to give these students greater confidence and an ability to aim for 'what's out there.' There is also life coaching; and voluntary roles are on the increase.

'That's because since becoming an interviewer with **Volunteer Wellington**, I've become aware of other enticing and interesting jobs which can be done on a weekly basis.' Cathy lives near the historic Katherine Mansfield birthplace. She says that a few hours each week giving people guided tours with information about both the house and the writer, is a great way of using the more creative left side of her brain.

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**'I have filled the gaps with new challenges. Among them is volunteering.'**

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Interviewing also happens on a weekly basis. This 'wonderful interactive meeting with people' has expanded her networks far beyond the usual course of events.

'I always like coming to do my shift because of the respect with which everyone is treated. The diversity and mix of skills among potential volunteers, is amazing.' ■



JOHN SAVAGE

## Volunteering addresses many causes and needs

**YING LEE** studied Japanese and technical engineering for five years before leaving her hometown, Dalian, in North China in 2000. Her destination was Wellington and her new majors were English and international business.

'My father had done some research and found that New Zealand is a beautiful place with fresh air and friendly people.' Ying came here by herself but quickly adds that New Zealand has been 'very lucky for me'. While studying at Victoria University, she met her boyfriend, an international student from Shanghai. By the end of 2003 she had completed her degree and was returning to China to marry.

In the middle of the year with the bulk of her studies complete, Ying had some spare time and a desire to meet other people. Especially New Zealanders. She decided to volunteer and became another one of **Volunteer Wellington's** international team of interviewers.

'At first I felt very shy and found myself blushing easily,' she said when we talked shortly before her return to China. 'Then as I talked with more and more people who came in to be interviewed my confidence grew and I realized how important the community organisations are in New Zealand. I would walk along the street with my boyfriend and point out community groups who are members. I've sent volunteers to that place, I would say. I felt very proud that I knew so much about the local life.'

There was certainly volunteering within family groupings in her hometown, she said, but not so much that she knew about on a more global scale. Although she added quickly that the SARS crisis had given rise to volunteering needs. 'What is interesting about New Zealand is that volunteering is about so many causes and needs as well as fun and interesting things – like sport and arts and culture.' ■

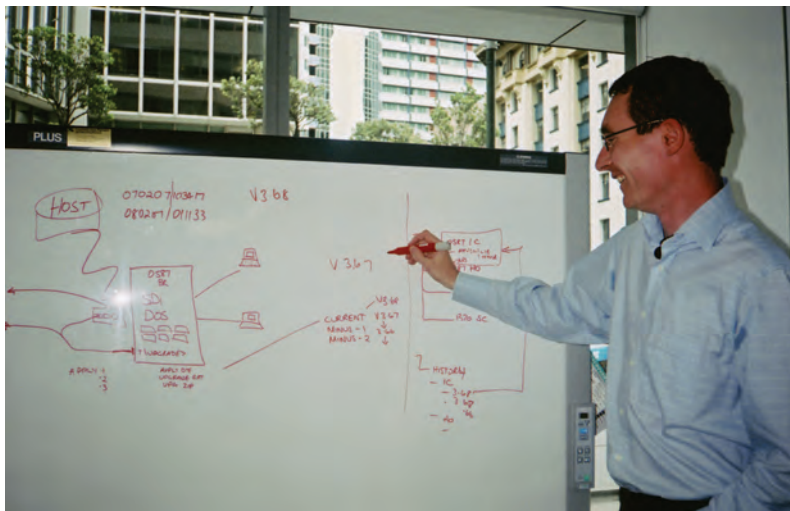
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**'Volunteering in New Zealand is about so many causes and needs as well as fun and interesting things – like sport and arts and culture.'**

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JOHN SAVAGE



JAI ME HAYDEN

## Frustrating, demanding and highly rewarding

**IAN HARRISON**, aged 30, from Newcastle, been in New Zealand eight years, currently lives in Wellington, works with Westpac as Manager Analyst IT Performance.

That's one side of his story. The other is much more radical. 'It's about stepping into the unknown ... it's demanding too and can be frustrating.' But he adds quickly and convincingly, 'it is also highly rewarding.'

We're talking about volunteering and with kids. Through the BGI (or Challenge For Change as the organization is also known), Ian became involved with a 20-week mentoring programme. The plan was to place young people with social problems alongside an adult who could bring some direction and positive development into their lives.

Ian met weekly with his young mentee, on a reading-based programme using stories that related to issues the youngster was dealing with at the time. There were also 'fun and adventurous' weekend activities, such as going to sports events, doing something out of the young person's comfort zone,

introducing experiences that would lead, hopefully, to more possibilities for interaction with peers and people of different ages.

'At the end of the 20 weeks this young boy did a fantastic presentation which showed the skills he had developed during that time – and his new ability to relate.'

For the past four years, Ian's regular volunteering has been a six-day Camp Quality stint during the summer holiday break. The 50 plus participants at the Camp are aged from five to 14, and all either have cancer themselves or have been affected by the results of the disease among family members.

Camp Quality aims to bring 'fun, hope and happiness' to kids and their families. And, as Ian emphasizes, celebrate life. Like mentoring, it's a one child/one adult affair. Companionship and having a nice time, is everything, he says.

'No I'm not a children's person.' Another emphatic statement. But quickly he adds: 'This sort of volunteering is brilliant for me. Camp Quality is my family. This year with my kid companion I got to make

**'This sort of volunteering is brilliant for me.'**



JAI ME HAYDEN

chocolate, ride a Harley Davidson bike – just kept having a really good time.'

Back on the Westpac front Ian remains enthusiastic. He believes wholeheartedly that such programmes 'help with life'.

He adds that he has been able to develop strengths and skills useful in his own work and life. He also met his long-term girl friend at the Camp a few years ago. As he said earlier, 'volunteering can be highly rewarding'. ■



JOHN SAVAGE

## 50 applications – one interview

**CHEW ENG LOKE** acquired the New Zealand equivalent of a chartered accountants' degree from Monash University in Victoria, Australia, and from there studied for a Masters degree at the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow.

For Malaysian Chinese there is always emphasis on achieving the best possible education, Chew explains. From Klang, 40 kilometres from Kuala Lumpur, he took MBA because there were so many people with the first degree, and he needed to take that 'one step further' for career purposes.

An alternative life-style was what motivated Chew and his family to seek New Zealand residency. Not so much of the rat race, more balance, Wellington (the family's choice of cities in which to live) is a beautiful place ... all these are reasons that kept Chew seeking paid employment here, for almost two years.

'I brought so much experience with me that I found it hard to believe that after 40 to 50 applications to hiring organisations I only got one interview.'

In retrospect he puts this down to two employer factors. The risk associated with hiring a 'foreigner,'

and, will the 'foreigner' fit into the New Zealand work culture?

One day, during this time of being both a new arrival and also endlessly applying for employment, Chew walked out of the Wellington Public Library and noticed the **Volunteer Wellington** sign across the road at 58 Victoria Street.

'I was bored and wanted to do something useful, so I volunteered.' For several months he was an interviewer with **Volunteer Wellington**, pleased to meet and interact with so many people. He also took on the role of treasurer for Literacy Aotearoa. This demonstration of a knowledge of the New Zealand work scene led to contract work. Also, further development of a consultancy business in Kuala Lumpur has followed.

Throughout the contract work stint, Chew maintained his volunteer treasurer's role. 'I felt glad to be involved with an organisation which is supporting so practically, those people who have missed out on a basic education.'

Unfortunately contract work has a short life. It has been necessary for Chew to keep his Malaysian options

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‘Volunteer interviewing and treasurer’s role demonstrated knowledge of the NZ work scene.’

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JOHN SAVAGE

alive. Through video conference connections from his Wellington apartment, this quality management system and strategic positioning consultancy is a fast growing concern. If a regular financial position does not eventuate here the 'alternative life style' may have to wait until a later stage. ■



## Something different for a change

**RAEWYN SINCLAIR** had been overseas for 16 years, so coming to Wellington in 2001 was arriving in a new city. Most of those years away were spent in personnel and as a recruitment consultant. Now was the time, she said, to try something different; as well as to become involved with this community.

She came to **Volunteer Wellington** seeking a role in the arts. There was also an interviewing vacancy on the database. Perhaps interviewing in an environment that was not focused on human resources would be different enough.

Both the New Zealand Portrait Gallery and the after-work interviewing slot with **Volunteer Wellington** seemed interesting. 'Talking to different people seeking voluntary roles would take me out of my usual work state – the ivory tower that full-time workers in HR can get stuck in. A sort of reality check.'

Satisfying her interest in art and gaining experience in the structure of a gallery happened through a weekly hosting role at the Portrait Gallery.

These two volunteering roles fitted into Raewyn's already busy life, adding the new dimensions and new experiences she was seeking. Possibly even new ways of looking at current work situations, she added. When the Gallery lost its premises some months ago, the collection of art and management systems were temporarily 'mothballed'. Once again Raewyn felt she had time for a second voluntary role, as long as it was after work.

During four years of interviewing with **Volunteer Wellington**, Raewyn has made several referrals to the ESOL Home Tutor Service. Now she was ready to take on the training herself. And having become an astute 'encourager' she was also able to encourage her husband to join her.

Now they are both out in the field, working regularly with refugee and new migrant students. 'I have worked with a Somalian older woman and a Hungarian immigrant. Both have been interesting challenges with completely different needs. It's rewarding work ... good friendships develop. My husband works with a family from China.'

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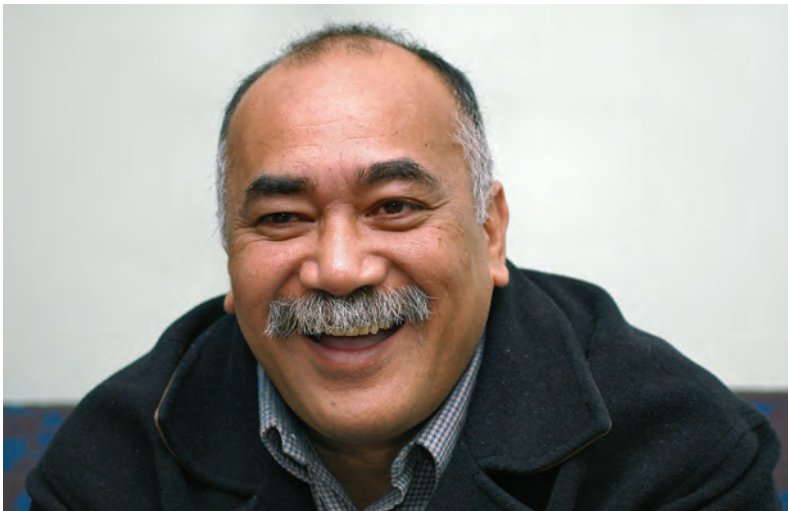
**'There is always plenty to talk about as we explore the database and all the possibilities.'**

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Again Raewyn talks about those full-time workers who come in on a Wednesday night to find something to do after-hours in the world of the grass-roots community. They are usually between 25 and 35, they have lots of motivation, and they want to give something back.

'There is always plenty to talk about as we explore the database and all the possibilities.' ■



ALAN WICKENS

## Loves his job

**OKESENE FARAIMO** came from Tokelau to New Zealand in 1963. He went straight from school to the railways as an electrical engineer. He was there for 25 years.

‘I didn’t really enjoy it as I’d always wanted to work with people, but I was comfortable, you know. You stay.’

Then came the restructuring of 2000 and TransRail was created, and with this change there were many redundancies. Okesene was one of them.

‘At first I was angry losing my job but then I thought this could be my opportunity to work with people – to get into social work.’

So he went back to school, first doing a one-year certificate through the NZ Institute of Training in Social Services. Good grades increased his confidence so he then began a two-year diploma course at Whitireia.

When this was finished Okesene felt he needed time out to relax. ‘My wife was always very supportive of my studies but when I began sitting

at home she soon got sick of having me round the house! But how to go about trying to find my feet in a new sphere?’

An ad in the local paper about **Volunteer Porirua** caught his eye. He needed to get his feet in the door of an organization involved with social work. His referral through the volunteer centre took him to Wesley Community Action – just up the road in Cannons Creek.

Then, like the pieces of a well-planned jigsaw puzzle, everything fell into place. Okesene’s confidence was restored with the interesting, challenging work in which he was immediately involved. His years of study combined with his ‘passion for people’ were standing him in good stead. Shortly after his volunteering assignment began a permanent social work position came up at Wesley.

Okesene had proved himself and was offered the job. At the time of this interview he was still there and loving it. ■

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‘ But how to go about finding my feet in a new sphere?’

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ALAN WICKENS





ALAN WICKENS

## 'Rattling a tin' led to executive involvement

**PAUL WHITFORD** started his working life as a linotype operator in the pre-digital newspapers days of hot metal and ink. When continual night shifts began to interfere with the demands of a 'typical young man-about-town's social life', Paul exchanged the machines that made newspapers for those that made hydro electricity.

Benmore Power Station in the South Island became his home until he moved to Wellington, now with a wife and the responsibilities of domesticity, and it was back to being a linotype operator on the *Evening Post* and later, the *Dominion*.

Meanwhile, alongside his wage-earning machine jobs, ran a thread of volunteering roles of a completely different nature. These were to create a pattern of challenges and achievements that have coloured Paul's later years. Lions Club committee assignments set Paul's organisational career in motion.

'I always have to say something and I ask a lot of questions.' With a grin he said that his wife never goes to any meetings with him but she is his biggest supporter. 'I do sometimes

ruffle a few feathers but I mean any criticism to be constructive and not destructive. I'm always looking for ways things can be improved.'

Now an Upper Hutt Valley resident, he has held a number of executive positions with the Rimituka Lions Club; he has also been involved for years with water safety and teaching young people to swim.

Then a couple of years ago, a chance invitation to collect for the Upper Hutt Stroke Foundation found Paul Whitford 'rattling a tin' in the local Countdown one Saturday. 'I had had a stroke a few years before so when Jean, the Stroke Foundation co-ordinator, came over to find out how I was going, I asked her how I could get involved.'

He had an 'instant understanding' of the organisation's tremendous value in the region by means of his first volunteering task: driving people to appointments and support groups. Then came his first AGM and Paul was once again in committee mode! They needed someone to re-establish the Foundation's Hutt sub-region. It seemed like an impossible task but

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**'We can all fill in a hole somewhere.'**

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ANU D'SOUZA

through Paul's efforts – and probably not a little ruffling of feathers – this has now been achieved.

What he says he has learnt most from working with people who have had strokes is how to listen and how to understand exactly what different people want to do. 'No one knows what they're capable of until they try – and everyone is needed. We can all fill in a hole somewhere.' ■



KATRINA CHING

## New chapters for Samoan brother and sister

**ANDREW SUA** has been dancing since he was a two-year-old. A performing arts course at Whitireia was a natural progression for developing his talents after leaving school. But then there was a lull. What to do next was the big question?

Meanwhile Andrew's sister, Condios, was at a different point on the career scale. Her children were getting older and starting school. A glimpse of a life where she could have time on her hands was emerging.

She started the next-step ball rolling by going along to **Volunteer Porirua** and coming out with a referral to the nearby Citizens Advice Bureau. 'This got me so motivated that I went back to the volunteer centre to find a couple more volunteering activities.'

One is interviewing new potential volunteers at **Volunteer Porirua** and the other working as a receptionist with the Porirua Budget Service. She is also on-call to do translation for the Samoan community when this is needed by the Citizens Advice Bureau.

Condios's enthusiasm was catching, and soon after her volunteering was in full swing, she was able to

talk her brother into going through the interview process to see what opportunities were 'out there'. She also thought it would be a positive way of getting him out of the 'having nothing to do' stage.

Andrew was surprised by the interview process. It was actually enjoyable – and interesting. He took on a role with SCIL (Te Riu o Whitireia – School Community Iwi Liaison), which involved remedial reading three times weekly with two young Samoan students at Mana College.

'I'm loving it,' he said when interviewed a few months after taking up the volunteering position. 'The staff welcomed me straightaway and have been supportive and helpful. They've given me video material to learn techniques to use when working with these students who are lagging behind. I'm amazed at how much this is helping them.'

Mana College staff were quick to observe Andrew's skills and asked if he would also consider teaching a Samoan cultural group. This is now happening regularly; as is additional mentoring with his two students.

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‘Before I came in to find this volunteering role I was quite lazy. Didn't have much to do. It was getting too boring.’

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KATRINA CHING

Andrew Sua is a lively, engaging young man enjoying the skills and networks he is developing through volunteering. Only 20, he is now beginning to think that teaching, with an emphasis on music and performance, could be a next step. Hard to believe him when he says: 'Before I came in to find this volunteering role I was quite lazy. Didn't have much to do. It was getting too boring.'

The word 'boring' is definitely not part of Andrew's vocabulary now. ■



## A community base in Timberlea

**TE WHARE WAIORA, TIMBERLEA COMMUNITY HOUSE**, is a dynamic presence in the Upper Hutt hill suburb of Timberlea. Young families of a recent generation are the main inhabitants of this one-time timber-milling region. They come and they go and sometimes connecting together can be difficult.

David Wharehinga is an exception. He's lived in Timberlea for 30 years. 'I know about the past and the present.' And as a youth worker and care-giver, he also knows about the importance of building a sense of community; and the family dislocation which can happen when everyone is 'too urbanised, too much in the fast lane and has no base.'

Today he is proud to be among a group of community enthusiasts who are all part of making sure there is a base – the community house in Timberlea. On the day **Volunteer Wellington** talked with some of the group, three generations of Timberlea dwellers were represented; they had just returned from presenting a hip hop and Christmas songs concert at an IDEA (under the auspices of IHC) supported house in Upper Hutt.

The teenager of the group, Stevie, was excited about the many 'performing visits' the community house has organised to old people's rest homes, hospitals and early in 2007 they will be part of a local festival called 'Taking it to the streets'. Stevie's mother, Julie Harris, is another stalwart of the committee. 'We want to take our talents out so that more and more people hear about Timberlea Community House; and we want all the families with young children around here to be involved with our free after-school programmes.'

Hip hop dancing and singing, art classes and a number of other activities are held every day at the house's headquarters situated in heartland Timberlea – the big park at the bottom of the hill. An average of 30 children attend most days.

Timberlea classes are facilitated by a couple of paid workers and a vigorous team of volunteers, many of whom are on the committee. 'This has been a great experience for us,' says Julie. 'We have learnt so many new skills – and the importance of people being involved.'

Stevie has the final say. 'The community house is so cool.' She's

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**'We are a focus for developing children's ideas and abilities.'**

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hanging out now for the next Timberlea Idol series. 'There's a lot of talent out there,' says her mother. 'We are a focus for developing children's ideas and abilities and with that comes self esteem and a sense of belonging – in this case to Timberlea.' ■

**For more information about Timberlea classes and activities ring Teresa, Julie, Chris or David on 526 8668.**



JAI ME HAYDEN

## Fine tuning on the telephone

**RENEE KORTEGAST** likes talking on the telephone – and she likes filing. Put these two ingredients together and you have an efficient events co-ordinator.

Tawa is 21-year-old Renee's base. She went to school there, her family and friends are Tawa-ites and for the past few months (at the time of this interview) her voluntary work placement has been from her home in Tawa.

As a child with a disability, Renee had enjoyed riding the horses that are the 'service providers' with Riding For The Disabled. Just over a decade – and also a number of training courses – later, she was 'wondering what to do' that would give her valuable work experience and lead to the administrative job on which she has set her heart.

During her referral discussion with **Volunteer Porirua**, Renee was attracted to a role with Riding For The Disabled, the organization which gave her so much enjoyment when she was young: 'special events ticket co-ordinator' was the title of the position.

Says Renee: 'It's about sitting down with a list of people and talking to them all on the telephone,

sometimes 20 to 30 one after the other.' Well, as we have already ascertained, this is right up Renee's alley! Her message is about special events for the children who participate as riders with Riding For The Disabled, and their parents. The event could be a magic show or a Christmas party. Renee's job is to tell them the how, when, why and where of the action; and encourage them to come along.

'I love the job – and once I get started and know what I'm going to say it gets easier. I know a lot about these events too because I've taken part in the past. Last year I got to go to the Christmas party and it was really nice meeting the people I'd been speaking to on the phone. I'm getting some new skills too, like building up rapport and being confident; and knowing what to expect when I leave messages. People almost never ring back so I have to be persistent ... and just keep on going until I've done everyone on my list.'

And on the other side of the coin, her employers at Riding For The Disabled are delighted. It's great to have such a good organiser and someone who likes talking on the telephone, they say. ■

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**‘I'm getting some new skills too, like building up rapport and being confident.’**

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JAI ME HAYDEN



KATRINA CHING

## Never too busy to volunteer

**JIA (ALVIN) HU** left his home in Shanghai China at 22 years of age to come to New Zealand in February 2003. With a degree in Mechanical Engineering from China and a solid grasp of the English language already under his belt, Jia entered Victoria University to study Finance. He is currently a third year student there.

Jia wanted to get 'local experience' with Kiwis while in New Zealand so he decided to try volunteering. With his outgoing personality he chose an interviewing position with **Volunteer Wellington**.

He's been doing this for one year now and has not only been exposed to the locals of Wellington but also people from all over the world including Sweden, South Africa and Switzerland. 'I really enjoy it and my communication has definitely improved.'

Jia's first language is Mandarin, he speaks some Japanese; and now he's becoming familiar with the extraordinary range of colloquialisms which are typical of New Zealand English.

But Jia's field of extra curricular activity hasn't stopped at **Volunteer Wellington**. His energy and enthusiasm are astounding and this

year, after being part of Victoria University for three years, he has already become a tutor for one of the Finance courses, Deputy President for the university's Chinese Association, was re-elected for Representative of School of Economics and Finance for the Student Commerce Association and is the first Chinese student to run in an election for the Student Association in the last 100 years or so.

He is also on the general executive for VUWSA Culture Club Council, an organisation with more than 50 participating culture clubs. Another activity is organising Kiwi Connections, a programme designed to help international students integrate into Kiwi culture.

Then in his spare time, which would seem non-existent to anyone else, Jia works part-time as a grocery assistant.

When asked about his experience as an interviewer, in regards to his future career, Jia replied that it is 'extremely important to build up my business network'. After graduating from Victoria University next year, Jia will look for work as a financial analyst in the United States or back in China.

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**'Volunteering has helped strengthen my character and is guaranteeing me a bright and successful future.'**

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KATRINA CHING

The opportunities that volunteering have given him, have helped strengthen his character and helped to guarantee him a bright and successful future, he says. ■

STORY ERIN MCMYNE



SIMON WILSON

## Creating a challenging, interesting mix

**MAGGIE MAY KENNEDY** was introduced to volunteering (outside her immediate family circle) when the buildings of her Alma Mata, her old school, were in danger of being demolished. She attended an inaugural meeting of the Save Erskine College Trust in 1992 and left as the group's first secretary.

A fluent Japanese speaker, Maggie had worked for more than a decade as sole charge administrator of Japan Fisheries in Wellington. Before that she had worked in similar roles in Australia and Japan.

The missionary zeal needed to save a series of old but historic buildings meant new skills, energies and networks were part of the next few years of Maggie's 'learning experience' in her new volunteering role. The Trust won their battle and Erskine College still stands. However, in 1998 Japan Fisheries withdrew most of their services from Wellington and Maggie was made redundant.

'This was anticipated,' says Maggie five years on. 'But it was still fairly devastating.'

The really soul-destroying bit came though, when she attempted to place her name and CV with employment agencies. 'Because I was in my late 50s they didn't even want to know.'

A trip abroad to visit family members followed. When she returned Maggie dropped into **Volunteer Wellington**. 'I could see people out of the corner of my eye doing all sorts of interesting work and I thought, I'd like to do that.'

So Maggie went through the formal interview process and then became an interviewer herself.

'This has now become part of my life, with training of new volunteer interviewers included. The skills learnt have been good for the part-time paid work I now do as a researcher with AC Nielson. Japanese Fisheries have also come back into the picture with more part-time work.'

Today Maggie works every week at balancing four portfolios with different demands and covering a wide range of society. 'It's the volunteering which makes the mix interesting and challenging.' ■

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**'It's great to have worked out a fulfilling way to live – and work.'**

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SIMON WILSON



JOHN SAVAGE

## Volunteering enhances communication skills

**FLO POASA** is an example of a young woman getting the studying bit between her teeth and then going on, from strength to strength. From Porirua and of Samoan heritage Flo went to Viard College until the 7th form. She then studied at Whitireia Polytechnic graduating with a New Zealand Diploma of Business and Management.

This initial study phase gave Flo the insight to realize there was more knowledge out there that she wanted to explore. She completed a degree at Victoria University majoring in Business and Human Resource Management and is now keen to work where she can have constant client contact and front-line interaction.

Since graduating she has worked in two jobs, one as a check-out operator and the other as a sales consultant with a leading Lambton Quay fashion shop. But her sights were set higher. 'I wanted to improve my communication skills, learn to draw people out, have more knowledge of diversity and cultural difference.'

These were the reasons that brought her to **Volunteer Wellington** and this is where she has been working on her one day off from her paid employment, for some months as a volunteer interviewer and administration assistant. 'I had not been exposed to the huge community of not-for-profit organisations before. The variety of services out there has been an eye-opener. Through having to use the database to refer potential volunteers to these agencies, I've improved my computer skills no end. I feel now I have a lot more tools at my fingertips.'

Flo says she has also learnt 'such a lot' from meeting and talking with so many new people. And, besides enhancing her skills, this experience of work through volunteering, has made her even more determined to keep aiming for the 'front-line' ... the human resource field and the place where communication takes place at its most challenging and demanding.

'I couldn't work behind closed doors.' ■

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**‘Through volunteering I have more tools at my fingertips.’**

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JOHN SAVAGE