



Once upon a time...

STORIES ABOUT VOLUNTEERS
AND VOLUNTEERING

VOLUME 2



Volunteer Wellington
A CATALYST FOR COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Introduction

Most volunteers have a story which they're keen to tell. As a paid worker with **Volunteer Wellington** for the past nine years, I love these stories. They are always a revelation. By sharing some of them, which were told during 2007 and 2008, with a few more added at the beginning of 2009, we at **Volunteer Wellington** feel our journey towards enlightenment is well on the way!

We've included new migrants, locals, students, Work and Income clients looking for ways to participate in community life, full-time workers, people with high-powered qualifications, people with none.

A significant number of our 380+ community member organisations are also mentioned throughout. They are on the other side of the volunteering equation; they are the community and voluntary sector.

People who come through our interview process not only find roles to which they want to be referred, they are also given a brief overview of the power and potential of this life-enhancing sector – a place where quality of life and support for a variety of issues, matter. We are privileged to meet so many of you who are interested in entering this 'place'. Thank you for your stories.

Many thanks too, to the writers, photographers and graphic designer whose gifts of time and talent have enabled this second volume of *Once Upon a time ... stories about volunteers and volunteering* to happen. The writers are Rosie Gordon, Michelle Guest, Kevin Jamieson, Sukanya Kanarally, Marisa King, Zoe Lawton, Diem-Trinh Le, Rosanne Robertson, Nicola Todd, John Walsh; the photographers Branka Cicek, Lynne Harding, Dave Kent and Alan Wickens; the graphic designer Sue Hobbs of minimum graphics.

Funders who have supported both the process of production and the publication are Family and Community Services, Trust House Charitable Trust and New Zealand Community Trust. We are very grateful to you all for your support and continuing interest in our work.

Pauline Harper

Volunteer Wellington

April 2009

\$20.00



ALAN WICKENS

Anything and everything

TASHA BLACK is the sort of person who finds time for anything and everything. Aged 20, Tasha made the move from Nelson to Wellington to study Education and Development Studies. As a Massey University extra-mural student she was pleased to find she could fit both paid work and volunteering roles into her day. Currently she has paid positions at the Kilbirnie Community Centre and as a library assistant at Wellington High School.

Then Tasha begins to talk about her volunteering roles. As a tutor for **ESOL HOME TUTOR SERVICE**, an organisation which provides English language and social support for adult refugees and migrants coming to live in New Zealand, she has had some eye-opening and hugely rewarding experiences. 'People have welcomed me into their lives. I once tutored a lovely Ethiopian woman who would cook traditional Ethiopian food for me when I would go round to her house.'

Although not a student at Victoria University, Tasha is the co-president of the Victoria University Red Cross Organisation and also volunteers for **RED CROSS**. This latter work led to paid

work last summer; thoroughly enjoyable on all counts.

'This is an example,' she says, 'of how volunteer work is a great pathway to paid employment. Employers value the volunteer work I have done and the experience gained from it.'

The list of Tasha's volunteering doesn't stop there. She is also an interviewer with **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON**, a position she enjoys describing as a 'good way to see the community as a whole and meet people I would not otherwise have the opportunity to meet'.

In fact it is volunteering that has opened her eyes to many issues in society of which she was previously unaware; an example is the number of highly qualified migrants who struggle to find work in New Zealand and who use volunteering as a positive first step on the employment ladder.

But it is Tasha's first volunteering stint after completing high school in 2004 which has probably inspired her most. She travelled to Ghana in West Africa and volunteered there for four months. This experience is what inspired her to take up so many volunteering roles



ALAN WICKENS

‘Employers value the volunteer work I have done and the experience I have gained.’

upon her return. 'Volunteering has made me realise there is so much we can do to help – every little bit helps. It can be as simple as taking a small amount of time out of your day to give blood.' ■

STORY BY ZOE LAWTON



New adventures with volunteering

SHANA KHAN wants to explore the world; she also wants to find out about different people and their lives and customs.

An Indo Fijian who became a secondary school teacher after graduating from the University of the South Pacific in Suva, she is currently at Victoria University on a NZAid scholarship – the result of an education agreement between Fiji and New Zealand. At the end of her one-and-a-half-year term here, she will have a Masters Degree in development studies.

Handout material from NZAid about volunteering PLUS Volunteer Wellington's Willis Street 'sandwich board' was the encouragement needed for Shana to turn the corner and find out 'just what volunteering was all about'. When she became an interviewer, talking to others who were seeking voluntary roles, she quickly realized that she was indeed exploring the world.

'In this role I am meeting people from all over the world. I am finding out about their experiences and then finding a place for them with

a community organization; and also telling them about New Zealand.' As many who come her way are either students or unemployed, career paths are a common topic of conversation.

'Sometimes people don't really know anything about themselves – or about life in the world beyond their studies. This is when I encourage them to step from their usual path and find something unique and different. Maybe it will be an environmental or recreational assignment. I point out that through this type of volunteering they will come to look at a broader picture. They will inter-relate and share knowledge, and so build contacts that will lead to new adventures.'

Shana is impressed with the way volunteering expands an individual's capacity. When she returns to Fiji after completing her studies, she intends to form some sort of volunteer group focusing on young people. 'Formal volunteering is not common in my country.'

Proof that she is an enthusiast, is her willingness in the course of a busy university year, to be involved with



‘Through volunteering they will come to look at a broader picture.’

additional promotional events. These have been talking on Access Radio (about volunteering), helping out with a workshop on volunteering with candidates from the Ship for World Youth – and also taking part at Careers Fairs at Victoria. All opportunities, she says, to develop skills and show them to the people of New Zealand. ■



A man and his dog

TIM SHEPPARD chose to change his life in his mid-50s for a number of reasons, but top of the list, now that the 'change' is in full swing, is the fact that he has struck a balance of interesting activity and that this is 'really liberating'.

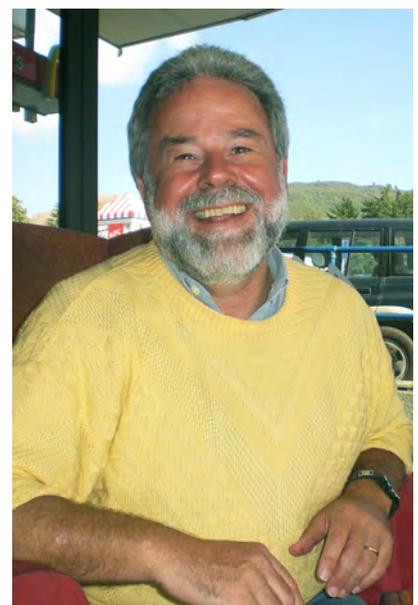
For the first few decades of his career, Tim travelled extensively with NZ Trade Commission Services. Redundancy a few years ago made him stop and think about all the things he had always wanted to do but had never had the time for.

First up, as he began to form a portfolio of interests, was training with the **PORIRUA LANGUAGE PROJECT** to be an adult literacy tutor. After that a whole variety of other possibilities came along. He joined the local Plimmerton Residents' Association. This led him to standing for Porirua City Council, of which he is now an elected councillor. Engaging in the local community was fast becoming a passion for Tim Sheppard. Involvement in local museums, and more lately Whitireia Community Polytechnic, is

giving Tim an overview of his diverse district and of where the potential lies for many community benefits. Establishing a scholarship for local secondary schools to study at Whitireia Nursing School is a case in point.

But the icing on the cake is saying goodbye to constant travel and being able to keep a pet. And this pet happens to be a kind, docile, beautiful Berenese Mountain Dog called Chloe. A further stage of Tim's community involvement came about after a visit to **VOLUNTEER PORIRUA** where he found out about 'hospital visiting with your friendly dog'.

Added now to his portfolio of interesting activity is taking off with Chloe every fortnight to Keneperu Hospital, where they both visit patients who are rehabilitating after strokes. 'Chloe is like a big cuddly teddy bear. She brings smiles and pleasure to so many people,' says Tim Sheppard, a man who has found retirement and community involvement, a liberating experience. ■



‘Chloe is like a big cuddly teddy bear. She brings smiles and pleasure to so many people.’



DAVE KENT

Exposure to another world

SUE HOBBS works for the World Health Organization in Geneva, and some other smaller international organizations and NGOs, from an eyrie upstairs in a building in Wellington's Cuba Street.

At the same time she also provides, as a volunteer, the graphics for the newsletter, flyers, posters, business cards and books for **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON**. It's been a great association of mutual benefit. Sue enjoys the exposure to another world and meeting local people, and **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON** has in turn greatly benefited from her experience and expertise.

Sue trained at the School of Design, once part of Wellington Polytechnic which became Massey University. She then worked in Dunedin and freelanced in London for the likes of *Latin American Newsletters* and *Spare Rib* magazine.

In the mid-1980s she moved to the Haute Savoie in France, about 50 kms across the border from Geneva, where she joined WHO and worked for 12 years.

When she returned to New Zealand in 1998 she never imagined that her work with WHO could continue, but indeed it has.

Sue has set up her own business – minimum graphics – which operates out of central Cuba Street with the voluntary aspect remaining strong.

While **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON** is a major focus, Sue also provides the graphics, again in a voluntary capacity, for another newsletter and finds time to volunteer once a fortnight at the plant nursery run by **WELLINGTON FOREST AND BIRD** which supplies plants to the Karori Sanctuary. One of group's interests currently is growing the right grasses for a potential takahe habitat.

It seems that one volunteer job has led to another and Sue has espoused the cause, seeing just how much depends on the work of volunteers. 'Without them (volunteers) the country would grind to a halt,' she rightly says.

At the time of this interview, Sue was designing another compilation of volunteers' stories, currently in the **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON** production pipeline, and the second such collection of inspirational tales. ■

STORY BY ROSANNE ROBERTSON



DAVE KENT

‘Without volunteers the country would grind to a halt.’



BRANKA CIGAK

Sushi to live – volunteering to enjoy

MAYUMI TAKEUCHI has travelled to New Zealand from Japan four times during recent years. Her fifth visit clinched the residency deal and she stayed. 'The air is fresh here and nature is beautiful.'

Mayumi explained about her background as a nurse in a psychiatric hospital in Osaka, where her work was mainly about giving support to people with mental health issues. Her home is now in Woburn, Lower Hutt, and through her local church group people suggested that a visit to **VOLUNTEER HUTT** could lead to a role close to her field of knowledge and experience.

As a result, working as a volunteer recreation assistant for **PRESBYTERIAN SUPPORT CENTRAL'S WOBURN HOME FOR THE ELDERLY** has been part of Mayumi's weekly agenda for the past few months. It's a varied role with sing-alongs some days (a good way to get the hang of more English words), going for walks on others and there are always mealtimes where she adds a note of bright friendliness ... 'practising my English and not feeling too nervous with these very nice elderly people'. There are celebrations too, like St Patrick's Day on March 17.

'These things are all helping me know more about life in New Zealand.'

Prior to Woburn, Mayumi carried out a stint at the **WELLINGTON CITY MISSION** with the foodbank and drop-in centre. Again having day-to-day conversations was the order of the day – as well as being involved in a service which contained aspects of her training and background.

Mayumi's earning-a-living job is working at a mid-city Sushi Bar. 'This is so I can live,' she says. 'When I am volunteering I am doing what I really like – and it is keeping me close to my nursing knowledge.'

When we carried out this interview we talked with the help of Fusako, a **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON** administration assistant and also from Japan. Since our conversation Mayumi and Fusako have become good friends, and the staff of **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON** are updated on Mayumi's search for employment in her own field. The last news we received was that she had an interview with a local hospital the following week; and also the chance of participating in a mental health support training module with



BRANKA CIGAK

‘... practising my English and not feeling too nervous with these very nice elderly people.’

another **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON** member organisation called **BUDDIES**.

There is no doubt that with Mayumi's interesting combination of generosity, goodwill and determination she will find fulfilling pathways and directions during her life in New Zealand. ■



Working for people and with people

GABRIEL RESDEBRI was a 'business sort of guy' in Ethiopia and later Sudan. He made (in fact invented if my interpretation of our English/Arabic conversation is correct) machines which were drawn by camels to crush sisal seeds to produce oil. 'Many people wanted my machines,' he said. 'I made good business.'

And then the fighting and life became more difficult, with much corruption and strife. Gabriel came to New Zealand as a refugee with his wife and five children in 1998. His family has gone in a variety of directions. Gabriel lives alone in the Newtown Park Flats. For some years he worked as a cleaner and then some problems; and then no work.

'New Zealand people work very hard and very good people. I hear about volunteering and I want to do some things with my hands. I want to give my work to the most good people of New Zealand.'

So Gabriel came to **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON** and looked for something he could do with his hands – and was for people and with people. **KEEP PORIRUA BEAUTIFUL** came first and in this role he painted out graffiti and became involved with planting projects. Even the distance to be travelled was 'no problem' for Gabriel. He's a smiling man who seems to be able to see the best in everyone ... when there is no bribery or corruption such as he witnessed in his own country. 'Very beautiful people in Porirua.'

Now he is volunteering closer to home with **WELLINGTON CITY MISSION** helping with the distribution of food and soup kitchen needs. He admires the New Zealand government and the work of Work and Income. 'I am looked after,' he said. 'But I do want to find paid work – anything.'

His expressive hands make the point. Meanwhile he is happy meeting people while he's using those hands with the **CITY MISSION**. ■



‘I hear about volunteering and I want to do something with my hands. I want to give my work to the most good people of New Zealand.’



Fond memories of volunteering in NZ

ELLEN SHENG remembers the first day, three years ago now, when she came into **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON** to talk about volunteering as an interviewer. 'I always got so nervous when I talked to people in English and I was in a bit of a panic that day.'

But despite the panic, Ellen's potential was easy to identify. She was studying psychology, wanted to help the wider community; as well as communicate with people outside her usual university circle.

Since that day in 2005, Ellen has been coming in every Thursday afternoon to talk with volunteer seekers, helping them find the right role in the community sector. 'I now LOVE to talk with different people – this enjoyment of volunteering has surprised me.' She emphasised too, that she had always talked with 'such nice people' and felt lucky that she could find them volunteering jobs which they were happy with.

Perhaps her knowledge of psychology helped to make Ellen Sheng's successful placement rate particularly high.

Perhaps she just struck it lucky ... her favourite phrase at the end of her shifts.

We talked on Ellen's last day at **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON** while she was assisting with a newsletter mailout to our 370+ community members. Two weeks later she would be joining her husband in Heidelberg where she now has a scholarship to study for her Ph.D.

Ellen is from Yantai in the East of China. She was encouraged by her father to come to New Zealand ... 'a fantastic place to study,' he told her. 'But when I was studying only, I realized I didn't know anything about New Zealand – just university. Volunteering has given me the chance to merge properly into the local community; I now realize so much more about the whole society.'

This is of value now that she is about to enter yet another group of communities. 'I can't wait to find out about volunteering in Germany.' The mailout was finished. We all said our goodbyes. ■



‘Volunteering has given me the chance to merge properly into the local community.’



ALAN WICKENS

Law and music working together

JONATHAN BASS admits that the legal music field in New Zealand is fairly limited. It's not the sort of arena with a list of positions appearing regularly in the weekend 'situations vacant'.

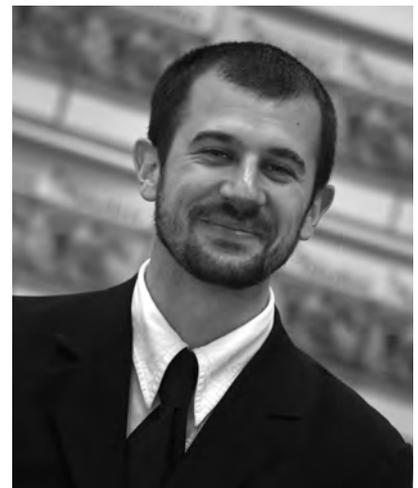
But Jonathan is a lawyer who is passionate about the music industry. So during that 'in-between-jobs' time of transition, after travelling and working overseas for a number of years, he came to **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON** to explore the voluntary sector. His hopes were for a role giving legal support and advice in the music world; and that's exactly what he found.

TE AKAMATAAUNGA OU is part of a Pacific Islands' Forum in Porirua with a mission 'to improve the lives of the people of New Zealand especially those from Pacific Nations, in all material and spiritual ways and to preserve and promote cultural heritage'. The active position on **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON's** database, at the time of Jonathan's interview, was for a lawyer who would help establish a company in the music industry for an organization that provides services to the Pacific community. The skills required were: a legal qualification and experience and an interest in the music industry.

Originally from Hamilton, Jonathan had never been to Porirua before taking on this volunteering role. His journey took him to the headquarters of **TE AKAMATAAUNGA OU**, a place with a radio station, a huge number of services, and a group of musicians keen to put Porirua and Wellington region music on the recording map. 'I found it refreshing to be part of something so ambitious.'

Black Box Limited is the name of the company which has evolved. Jonathan's advice has been around copyright and contract legalities; and although he now has full-time work with the Ministry of Social Development's national contracts department, he will continue to communicate by email about the ongoing legal requirements of Black Box.

'They're about rap and a Pacific Island form of cultural expression. They've organized some great gigs out in Porirua with DMX and other well-known hip hop artists. Now the hope is that Black Box produces a good CD and sells well. 'I am excited to be involved.' ■



ALAN WICKENS

'I find it refreshing to be part of something so ambitious.'



JALME HAYDEN

Emerging from a time of transition

RICHARD HEULIN is a young man emerging from a time of transition. He has good degrees and he has had good jobs. But some months ago they dried up and a self-confessed 'shy, introverted person' had to think about other things.

Yes, being unemployed is stressful, says Richard, 'for my friends and family, as well as myself'. However, he soon became aware that this was a time when he could reflect, and plan more carefully what skills could lead to sustainable employment. Richard also felt he was being given a chance to develop other sides of his character; like interacting more positively with a cross-section of people, learning about the art of clear communication. Toastmasters and an impromptu acting group at Victoria University have been part of his answer. Another, has been volunteering.

Through **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON** he found an administrative role with **AGE CONCERN WELLINGTON**, an organization that states in its mission 'not everybody has somebody'. They are dedicated to changing situations where older people are lonely and isolated. Richard has high praise for the Executive Director, Annie Anglin. 'When

I first came to work on a more-or-less weekly basis, she spent time telling me the history of **AGE CONCERN** and all about its aims and values. Her passion made me feel that I was becoming part of something important.'

Data entry, computer work, book-keeping and the general odd jobs associated with offices were Richard's tasks; but top of his learning achievements, with the support Annie, is answering the telephone. 'I now have a good, confident telephone manner – before I used to ramble on endlessly!'

He added that his volunteering work had changed his perspective on life. 'Now I notice publicity posters for community groups (SPARC is an example) and I think, oh I could give that a go. This is giving me a fuller life.'

The skills he has learnt on the job with **AGE CONCERN** are all helpful: good for interviews with prospective employers as well as arming Richard with new confidence about a set of skills which sit well on his CV. At the time of this interview Richard had part-time employment at the Michael Fowler Centre. But his aim now is to find full-time work that is sustainable and useful. ■



JALME HAYDEN

‘I now have a good, confident telephone manner – I used to ramble on endlessly!’



Finding the right sort of direction

KERI-ANNE EDGE is working towards being a graphic designer, an account manager, an artist, a web designer. She comes from South Africa where she completed a diploma in IT. Travel then took her to England where she volunteered with the Tymes Trust, an organisation dedicated to improving the lives (and the lives of their support people) of children with ME.

While the work gave her experience in magazine work and she was developing a robust portfolio, she was beginning to realize that she needed more training. 'I wanted to be able to move from concept to print; and as I was being given the authority to lead meetings, I was also now aware that my ideal job would be as an accounts manager.'

Two years ago she came to New Zealand with her husband and they settled in Grenada Village. As she began to apply for jobs in her fields of interest – mainly with advertising agencies – Keri-Anne found there was always an expectation that applicants would have a complex set of skills with graphic design high on the list. She also needed more web design experience if her portfolio was to carry the necessary weight required by employers.

VOLUNTEER PORIRUA was therefore Keri-Anne's next port of call. Her web design referral led her to **PORIRUA LIVING WITHOUT VIOLENCE**, a neighbouring organisation in Pember House. During her first visit there she found that they were also looking for an artist – 'a right now need,' said Keri-Anne.

'She's an artist,' was the call from management staff who took her immediately into the nearby children's play area where the design for a mural was being planned. The room is used while consultation and counselling is taking place; it needs to be bright, cheerful and happy.

Keri-Anne stayed for the next three weeks drawing the outline and form for the vibrant mural which were later filled in by a corporate team also organised by **VOLUNTEER PORIRUA**. Her first website design followed. **PORIRUA LIVING WITHOUT VIOLENCE** were happy with the result.

A further volunteer web-based referral then took place; this to the **NZ POLICE MUSEUM**. 'I had now decided to get serious – I was finding the right sort of direction and outlet for my skills.'



‘I had now decided to get serious – I was finding the right sort of direction and outlet for my skills.’

Keri-anne has created a model which is to be used at an international conference to provide access to a group of similar museums.

She now has a portfolio with local content which pertains to the districts near where she lives...and in the future hopes to work. ■



Volunteering salad bowl

MAYUMI BURKHART is from Japan. Benjamin her husband, from Germany. They met each other in Bangalore, South India. After a four year 'romance in long distance mode' they married and for their own reasons, decided to live in a different country altogether. They chose New Zealand.

Once here, Mayumi decided to volunteer to develop social contacts that would help eventually to get a paid job. Besides, she had to reinvent herself in a different cultural locale. Volunteering, she felt, would be the first step.

While volunteering at **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON** and **NATIONAL NETWORK OF STOPPING VIOLENCE**, Mayumi is also doing a part-time job for a Japanese agency to support Japanese students who are studying in New Zealand.

She works as a link between Japanese students in Wellington and the families who offer home-stay accommodation. 'Volunteer work has given me a chance to relocate myself successfully,' she says, emphasising that volunteering helps an immigrant to regain the social and human capital lost in the immigration process.

What has Mayumi's experience of job-hunting been? 'Well, not so favourable. But the search goes on. I have been meeting interesting people at the places I volunteer. It takes time to find a niche in a new country. I hope to find a job that I am happy doing,' she concludes.

Much as motivated individuals like Mayumi strive to get into the workforce of New Zealand, the system too – if it cares not just for a melting pot with a certain dominant flavor, but a salad bowl of cultures – needs to open its arms to a 'delightful diversity'. In such collaboration lies the benefit for both. Mayumi is aware that the complexion of the NZ workforce has changed significantly over the decades and hopes to find a niche for herself in the course of time.

According to Felix Adler, the founder of Ethical Culture movement, 'people are not the bricks of which a house is built, but the pieces of a picture puzzle, each differing in shape, but matching the rest, and thus bringing out the picture.'

Mayumi Burkhart ('I took Benjamin's German last name), a Japanese-German, is a bright and dedicated part of the New Zealand diversity picture. ■



‘Volunteer work has given me the chance to re-locate myself successfully.’

STORY AND PHOTOS BY SUKANYA KANARALLY



BRANKA CIGAK

Winning all around

JAIME HAYDEN has always wanted to do volunteering of some kind. She states that her parents are very generous people so helping out became a habit – part of her life. But interestingly, it was contacts she made early in 2007 through her paid work that led to her getting around to some formal volunteering.

After studying photography at UCOL in Palmerston North Jaime moved to Auckland where she worked for a couple of years in a photography laboratory. 'A monotonous time,' she says. 'Every day the work was the same.' Jaime is outgoing and creative, definitely someone who thrives on the unexpected. So next she was off to Wellington where she took on a job working at the *DominionPost* selling advertising and organizing feature articles.

After a few weeks in her new position she became involved with a supplement being put together by **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON** to promote the Wellington Region Foundation Corporate Challenge 2007 series. During the process of talking with **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON** staff members, Jaime realized that 'now the volunteering I had been thinking about

doing for so long, was in my face. The perfect opportunity for a bit of action!'

She was surprised with the conversation that followed. What are your interests and skills? What would you really like to do? 'I had thought all volunteering was either about youth that had fallen off the rails or picking up rubbish – something laborious and probably a bit boring.'

At the time, **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON** needed a more-or-less on-the-spot photographer; someone who could leap out for an hour here and there (lunch breaks would be fine) to photograph the people who are the subjects for volunteer profiles, such as this one about Jaime. The position needed to be filled by a person with photographic skills, instant creativity and the ability to build rapport. Jaime Hayden has all those qualities, plus the fact that her full-time work with the *DominionPost* takes place just round the corner from **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON**'s offices at 84 Willis Street.

At the time of this interview Jaime had photographed four different people for stories which have been published either in local papers or the publication *'Once upon a time...Stories about volunteers and volunteering.'*



BRANKA CIGAK

'I had thought that all volunteering was either about youth or picking up rubbish.'

Jaime is finding that this 'helping out' habit of a lifetime, encouraged by her parents' generosity, is taking her down a much more challenging and creative path than she would ever have imagined. 'I get to do the photography that I love – I get to give some of my time to someone else.' ■

STORY BY ROSIE GORDON



After the wedding

KAREN KRIZMAN's story starts with a fairy tale wedding. A 'first love' from teenage years suddenly made contact with her 25 years later. She lived in New York and he in Germany. He came to visit and a month later the couple decided to marry. A few weeks later they were on their way to New Zealand to continue Axel's posting as first secretary chancellor with the German Foreign Service.

'I'd always supported myself before this and managed to fit in volunteer work as well. Suddenly I was in a position where I was being encouraged to relax and take it easy.' Karen could cope with this complete change of life style for a while; but inevitably, she said 'I didn't feel very productive. I needed more involvement and sense of purpose.'

An added difficulty was that she also wanted her 'involvement' to be flexible enough to allow her to travel regularly with her husband. The website and a search using the word 'volunteer' brought her to **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON** for an interview. The results of this visit have been several full months – at the time of this interview – of diverse, and also flexible, volunteering assignments.

First up, and something Karen continues to do on a weekly basis when she and Axel are stationed in Wellington, has been interviewing other potential volunteers for **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON**. 'I really like people and this intense introduction to so many different ethnicities and circumstances is something I would never come across in the more rarified world of diplomacy.'

Bright, vivacious and energetic, Karen was soon keen to extend her volunteering to include project management work which would have a beginning and an end that fitted with her next likely trip away from Wellington. At the time this was first discussed, an event was about to be organized to celebrate the finale of the 2007 Corporate Challenge series. Karen took on the role of event organizer with gusto. And in the process met Maureen Ngaira, from the Fanau Children's Centre in Cannons Creek. Children, and being in the thick of a grass roots local organization, became Karen's next volunteering assignment.

Karen Krizman drove out to Porirua every week. She was affected both by 'Maureen's passion for the children' as



‘The exchange of ideas has shed new light on life for me.’

well as working with the culture of a Pacific Island group of children and their parents. 'Everyone embraced me as I have them. The kids are fabulous. I feel the exchange of ideas that has come with these different experiences has shed new light on life for me. It has been very exciting.' ■



JALME HAYDEN

Quiet does not mean unskilled!

MUBIN SHAIKH lives with friends in Waitangirua, north of Porirua. It's a long way by train to Parliamentary Services where he was working at the time of this interview. But nothing compared to his journey into central Mumbai (Bombay) where he worked as an accountant for 15 years before coming to New Zealand. There was standing room only for nearly two hours every morning and night on that journey.

Mubin has a B.Com in accounting from Mumbai University. Combined with his experience in the field in India he was well up in the skilled migrant points system and arrived in Wellington in May 2006, already with a Permanent Resident's Visa.

A group of friends encouraged him to migrate. He states emphatically that New Zealand is a 'very very beautiful country ... but I did have a little bit of trouble finding employment.' That's an understatement. Quietly spoken Mubin searched for several weeks and was always told 'you must have some New Zealand experience; you must know about our ways'.

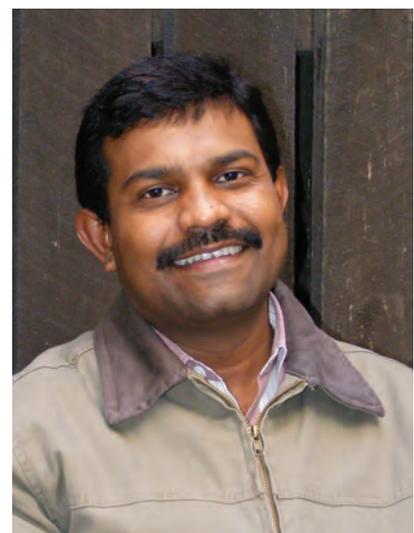
Following up on Work and Income in Porirua's suggestion to visit **VOLUNTEER PORIRUA**, he found a

volunteering position with **PORIRUA CITY COUNCIL'S SETTLEMENT SUPPORT**. Mubin may be quiet but when he began to talk about his role he said with a grin: 'Debit and credit are the same the world over!'

He was surprised at how interesting he found this experience; the way he was included with all staff and involved with meetings and decisions which needed to be made. 'I was very happy and feel this volunteering was an important part of settling in and knowing more about the community and the support that is out there for people.'

His manager at **SETTLEMENT SUPPORT**, Annette Woods, also had some good things to say about Mubin Shaikh. 'He is the fastest learner I have ever worked with – and while he was with us made a positive difference in our office doing a wide variety of administration work, and of course some accounts.'

The moral of Mubin's story is that quiet does not mean unskilled. But proving the point to locals often takes some practical experience and evidence. This is where volunteering in the more welcoming and supportive community and voluntary sector is an important stepping stone both to paid employment and settling in. ■



JALME HAYDEN

‘This volunteering was an important part of settling in and knowing more about the community.’



This is the ideal job!

JANE GLASGOW 'didn't know what to do with herself' during a time of crisis in her life. In 2004, with an operation looming and the break-up of her marriage, she was at an all time loss. 'I couldn't stand the thought of being at home all day.'

Nervous and feeling vulnerable she approached **VOLUNTEER HUTT** hoping to find a position in the voluntary sector. 'I became a host at the **DOWSE** (now the **NEWDOWSE**) working with a supportive, encouraging team. My interest in life slowly began to return.'

Highlights of the role for Jane were learning about art and New Zealand artists, developing good interpersonal skills; and probably most significantly being invited, along with other volunteers, to **DOWSE** events and happenings. 'We were made to feel important.' As her health improved, Jane decided she could fit more volunteering into her life. This time the suggestion was to be an interviewer with **VOLUNTEER HUTT**. 'I was thrilled and soon began to develop a whole new set of skills. As we began to work with more agencies giving support to people who were both long-term unemployed and who often had health problems, I became better at picking up people's

depression and anxiety. I could organize the right sort of conversation to assess how well they might function in a particular role – when to encourage, when to keep listening. I became more aware of effective ways to advocate and make decisions about placements.'

When **VOLUNTEER HUTT** opened an outreach in Upper Hutt early in 2007, Jane, who lives in Upper Hutt, felt confident about running the weekly session held in Community House, Logan Street, with fellow Upper Hutt resident Margaret Woollett.

Then the breakthrough happened and she was offered part-time paid employment. This came about through community networks she had come across in the course of more than two years of interviewing. Jane now has permanent employment with **OASES**, an organization dedicated to supporting and advocating for people who have experienced mental illness.

'With my volunteering and personal experiences rolled together this is the ideal job for me,' said a happier, relaxed Jane Glasgow, three years after her first hesitant approach to **VOLUNTEER HUTT**. ■



‘We were made to feel important. My interest in life slowly began to return.’



ALAN WICKENS

Helping others to overcome barriers

NAOMI MIDDLETON's travels through South East Asia deepened her awareness of underprivileged sectors of the population and of the setbacks many people face as a result of factors outside their control. She does not take for granted the freedoms she has been able to enjoy in her New Zealand upbringing, she says, and feels some responsibility to use this 'privilege' to empower others.

'One of my aims is to help others overcome barriers to reaching their personal potential.'

Today a Porirua resident, and also a full-time worker with Greater Wellington, she is determined to fit volunteering work into her 'work/life balance' timetable. Through **VOLUNTEER PORIRUA** she found out about **RMS REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT** and quickly became immersed in the organisation's full training programme.

Through **RMS REFUGEE SUPPORT** in Porirua, Naomi met and is now a support worker with three young Burmese (Myanmar) migrants living locally. Tin Za uk aged 16, Kuku 18 and Thluang uk Thang 24, separated from

their parents, have become her friends; Naomi is both a guide and important role model.

As the relationship between the young family and their New Zealand supporters grows, the three are developing a maturity and knowledge base which will equip them to participate in local community life, she says. 'They are building up contacts which will help them cement a permanent place in our country.'

Some of these contacts have taken the family as far afield as a work experience stint with a Martinborough vineyard. By being given this opportunity to work they performed extremely well, Naomi said, and have now built an ongoing relationship with the winegrower's family. 'They plan to use this experience to gain more knowledge of the New Zealand way of life and with the added prospect of obtaining training for future employment.'

Naomi emphasized that her three friends – met through her determination to volunteer with people from restrictive backgrounds – have



ALAN WICKENS

'They are building up contacts which will help them cement a permanent place in our country.'

limitless potential for contribution to the New Zealand community. 'This will become a reality now that their confidence levels are growing and they will be able to use their natural abilities for the benefit of both themselves and this country.' ■

STORY BY JOHN WELSH



BRANKA CIOK

Volunteering: a big stepping stone

MARIA PEDERSON was, for 20 years, very family orientated and busy with all the tasks of home building and family raising. Her experiences of the commercial world was minimal. Maria is a born and bred Wellingtonian with a family of Greek ethnicity who strongly believed that a woman's place was 'in the home looking after the family's needs'. Her Kiwi born husband had a similar outlook.

When Maria's marriage ended she became a solo mother with a need to fend for herself, a change which she found very depressing. 'I had no confidence and no skills to earn my own living with,' she said. 'With my focus for so many years on work in the home I felt it would be impossible for me to get a paid job.'

During a counselling session at that time, volunteer work was suggested as a way to meet people, make a useful contribution in the community and gain some ideas on what sort of skills she may have. It was a big and difficult step into the unknown to even contact **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON**; but to Maria's surprise – and pleasure – she found a most supportive environment. In fact her interviewer at **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON** was so encouraging

that Maria also decided to join 'this friendly, helpful team' by becoming an interviewer herself.

This was a great boost to her confidence. Work at the **PORTRAIT GALLERY** was also lined up and soon Maria was doing two half days voluntary work at each organisation. On-the-job training at her own pace was appreciated and before long Maria was developing competent computer skills; but even more important was the growing realization that she had excellent people skills.

After about six months in her satisfying volunteer roles, Maria saw an advert for a part-time retail position at a pharmacy. With her new confidence and skills base, and battling to overcome years of innate nervousness, Maria applied for the job – and got it! For the next 18 months she worked in her new position while continuing her volunteer work. Then full-time work beckoned, firstly in a pharmacy, then in a bank and on a reception role with a government agency. Now Maria works in a reception and counsellor-support role at a professional counselling organisation.

Maria has no doubt that her experiences through **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON** have been relevant to her



BRANKA CIOK

‘Volunteering was a great stepping stone to help get from A to B, to make the big transition into paid employment.’

paid positions, especially her current role where working sensitively with people often in difficult situations, is vital. Including volunteer work in her CV has been significant; she continues to undertake voluntary work on specific tasks as time allows.

‘Volunteering was a great stepping stone to help get from A to B, to make the big transition into paid employment,’ says Maria. ■

STORY BY KEVIN JAMIESON



JUDY KERR

Passionate about ethical trade

MICHELLE GOH is passionate about the concept of ethical trade. Her insights and knowledge have been gained from regular volunteering at **TRADE AID**'s central Wellington retail shop. 'The inner workings of fair trade,' she calls it; and this is the calibre of information now being added to her Honours Degree studies in International Relations at Victoria University.

Originally from Malaysia, Michelle described her background as 'wanting for nothing'. It would be easy, she said, to fall into a very materialistic way of life. She feels happier in New Zealand where there is more egalitarianism, less divisions between social sectors.

Her enthusiastic eagerness to fit volunteering into an intense university programme has kept her focused on her goals to be ethical; and to make sure she has the facts right. As more knowledge of the environment is part

of this drive, Michelle returned to Volunteer Wellington for a further interview. She took a referral to **GLENSIDE STREAMCARE TRUST**.

'Geography is one of my subjects so I wanted practical environmental experience – something more than the theoretical.' The people with this neighbourhood conservation group are wonderful, she says. The opportunity to work at a local level finding out about locally sourced plants and to be 'in there boots and all' is exactly the sort of knowledge Michelle is looking for.

There is no doubt that eventually Michelle Goh will follow through with her dream to work in a Third World country; possibly Ethiopia or Tanzania. The wisdom she has gained from such organizations as **TRADE AID** and **GLENSIDE STREAMCARE** will take her far. ■



JUDY KERR

‘I have gained much insight into the inner workings of fair trade.’



Answering the call

HAROLD GUNSON met me at 9.30 am at Porirua Station. ‘A lovely day,’ he said, ‘so let’s go round to my place at Plimmerton for a cuppa.’ Harold had just finished a two-hour stint giving breakfast to children at Russell School in Porirua East, a scheme initiated by the **RED CROSS** in early 2008.

Harold (Ngati Toa and Te Atiawa on his mother’s side) lives in a small paradise. Across the road from his house is the point – a prime fishing spot. Mana Island can be seen from every room and up the road is his family’s Marae. This is where he’s lived all his life and for the past four decades with Helen his wife.

He has worked with Radio New Zealand, the Public Service and, with other members of his family, he helped build the Hongoeka Wharenui in 1997. But he has always ‘answered the call’ to move beyond family and neighbourhood needs and out into the wider community.

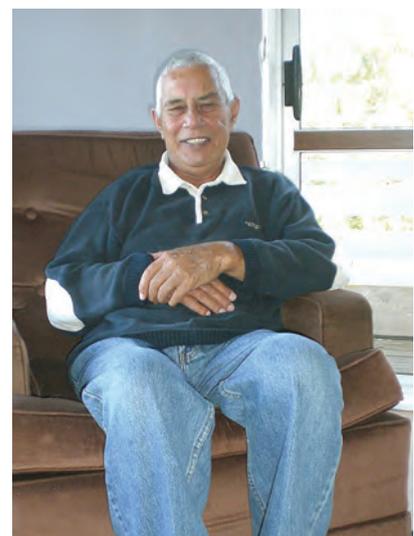
The first ‘call’ was from the **SALVATION ARMY** in the 80s. Food prices were

on the rise with the increase in unemployment. There was a lot of poverty, a lot of need, said Harold. ‘We were responding to this need with food and assisting people to get the help they required. I even took my grandson along so that he could see how good he had it around here.’

A more recent call came after a visit to **VOLUNTEER PORIRUA**. In the course of his interview there, he learnt about the ‘breakfasts in schools’ programme. ‘Anything to do with kids gets your heart going.’

Harold is unassumingly matter-of-fact. ‘I go down twice a week and we organise the weetbix, toast and hot drinks – all supplied by Countdown – and then in come the kids ... at least 20 and sometimes up to 40. It’s good. We talk and get to know them all.’

The scheme is based around ‘a happier child will work harder and get school work done.’ Good things are happening with weetbix, bread and teams of good volunteers. ■



‘... and then in come the kids ... at least 20 and sometimes up to 40. It’s good. We talk and get to know them all.’



We watched Violetta blossom

VIOLETTA PLAZEWSKA came to New Zealand from Poland because, she said, 'love is blind'. Her husband had a good job to go to but in Violetta's words 'no one was going to offer me a job – my English was not so good'.

With an MA in International Relations and employment in a high flying role with American Express, following her husband was indeed a journey of love! When she arrived here, Violetta immediately joined ESOL as an adult student. 'People say my English is o.k, but I didn't really feel it. So I decided to find a volunteering way as I really really wanted to work. I didn't want to stay home any more. On-the-job practice was what I needed.'

Violetta chose an administration and data entry role with **SAVE THE CHILDREN NZ**. 'Right from the beginning everyone was so nice –

in the first discussion with Winifred we started talking about my background. This made me feel very comfortable.'

After a few weeks she was asked to do reception work. Everyone believed in her ... confidence grew. Then through the **WELLINGTON CITY COUNCIL** sponsored employment scheme for new migrants, and with 'fresh CV news', Violetta was offered a job at Newtown Library. This later became permanent work with Island Bay and Brooklyn Libraries also included.

Violetta loves the many cultures and many colours of New Zealand. 'And I now have friends and I know how to joke! A sure sign of successful settling in.'

As volunteer co-ordinator Winifred says: 'Volunteers give, we give. We watched Violetta blossom.' ■



‘I know how to joke! A sure sign of successful settling in.’



On the job and meeting people

MARLIN YOKHANA came here from Baghdad, Iraq, in 2006 as part of the family re-unification scheme. Her daughter, one of Marlin's four children, was already living in Wellington. She was worried about her mother's safety.

'Every day,' said Marlin during a break in her volunteering administration role with **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON**, 'I would pass three cars bombs in the morning and three in the afternoon.' But every day Marlin went to her place of work at the same time and along the same route. 'Everyone said they will kidnap you – but I believed God would save me.'

Today she talks about these experiences calmly. She is always elegant and well-dressed and says she was the same in war-torn Baghdad. And somehow her belief that she would stay safe, worked. The international import/export company for whom she worked for 30 years, kept trading through those traumatic years; and much of its stability would be due to the determined persistence of Marlin's management.

After arriving in Wellington she went straight to ETC Learning Centre to improve her English. Her subsequent volunteering roles have taken her into the practical world of being 'on the job and meeting people in the work scene'. These assignments have included the **NATIONAL COUNCIL OF WOMEN**, **KILBIRNIE LIBRARY** and more recently **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON**.

In the course of her **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON** role, Marlin supported volunteer interviewer and colleague Evelyn Churchill, whose disabilities mean assistance is needed moving her wheelchair from taxi to office. 'I will miss you Evelyn,' she said on her last day. 'Next week I am moving on to a job as a childcare assistant.'

Thursday afternoons in the office will likewise miss Marlin with her charm, elegance and warm welcome to all who visit; and the occasional sounds of Middle Eastern music ringing on her cell phone. 'This is my home now,' she says, 'and I very much like the people here, but I do miss the sounds of my country.' Easy to forgive a cellular when it sounded so exotic! ■



‘This is my home now.’



Lively discussion with gifted kids

MAN LING SONG has a chemistry background and before coming to New Zealand was a chief engineer with Proctor and Gamble, one of the biggest producers of laundry products in the world.

She comes from Jiang Su Province in South East China and now, with her Scottish industrial engineer husband, lives in Stokes Valley, Lower Hutt.

Her English learning began while still in China and going to an 'English corner' on Saturday mornings where a foreigner is matched up with a student. The foreigner she met was the man who became her husband. As he had no knowledge of the Chinese language, the couple decided that they needed to emigrate to a place new to them both. They chose New Zealand.

And it was her husband who noticed the **VOLUNTEER HUTT** sign suggesting volunteering as a good way to go. 'I need to practise speaking English,' said Man Ling, adding that she also needed to listen to New Zealand accents and not just the broad tones of her Glaswegian husband!

Man Ling took on a role with the **GIFTED KIDS PROGRAMME** run from Naenae Intermediate. Entitled 'Lunchtime Supervision' the position quickly took a dynamic turn towards a serious conversation time. 'I used the opportunity to talk about China and tell the students about informative websites – particularly those relating to Beijing, the Olympic Games and other aspects of history.'

As these are children who enjoy learning and are eager for new knowledge and experiences, Man Ling has introduced painting and writing Chinese symbols into her lively lunchtime discussions. Parents too have often become involved. 'While I help the children this work is also helping me understand a different culture. Now I feel more part of the New Zealand community.'

Eventually Man Ling Song will find a job in her own field; but as she is getting to know places and people she says her aim is to help out. ■



‘Now I feel more part of the New Zealand community.’



BRANKA CIGAK

Volunteering a key to paid work

SHAIMAA YASSIN, originally from Egypt, came with her husband to New Zealand in February 2007, having worked in Saudi Arabia for two years.

When her husband was offered a job in IT in New Zealand, the couple thought it would be a nice place to settle (and a relief to escape the 50 degree temperatures!) and Shaimaa thought there would be no trouble getting a job herself. She had worked in the Venezuelan Embassy in Saudi, as an executive assistant, using her second language Spanish, and was well qualified.

However when she arrived she noticed that prospective employers seemed to find contacting her overseas referees a stumbling block and job offers did not exactly flow in. 'The job titles are different here,' she said, 'and so are the job descriptions.'

After months of active job seeking, Shaimaa discovered **ESOL HOME TUTORS WELLINGTON** and the **JOB MENTORING SERVICE** which is run under the same umbrella. She worked with them over six months to fine-tune her CV and better understand the New Zealand culture and way of life.

Encouraged by her job mentor Sally, she took up a volunteering role with

the **CITIZENS ADVICE BUREAU** in Johnsonville.

'Through this work I learnt so much about local services and the way New Zealand and New Zealanders function. And I was encouraged by the friendliness and informal attitude of the people.' She added that it was, in fact, refreshing after a culture 'rather too keen on job titles'.

The mentoring service is located in the same building as the **INTERPRETING WELLINGTON** service. Shaimaa noticed their advertisement for an office administrator and applied immediately. She got the job and credits her experience as a volunteer with being the key to getting her established in her whole new working world. And the manager of the Johnsonville **CITIZENS ADVICE BUREAU** was happy to act as Shaimaa's referee – another very important aspect of 'finding a job in New Zealand'.

Today Shaimaa says: 'This office administrator position is a perfect job in the not-for-profit sector, working with and meeting people from all over the world. My colleagues come from Iraq, Samoa, the Philippines and China. I learn something new every day.' ■

STORY BY ROSANNE ROBERTSON



BRANKA CIGAK

‘I was encouraged by the friendliness and informal attitude of the people.’



Man on a mission

BRADLEY MARTIN is on a mission. Aged 30, from Taradale near Napier, he has Business Management degrees from Massey, been around the world and carried out further study at Victoria University, finishing with a Bachelor of Arts in Public Policy in June. His travels have taken him to Auckland, London, and China, where he taught English. Now he wants a position in a government department; but to get a job you need experience, to get experience you need a job. His ultimate goal is environmental policy.

However Bradley is realistic, patient and persistent. His route to experience was to volunteer. He went through the interview process with **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON** and then became an interviewer himself with **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON**. His untapped talent was obvious; he had the excellent communication skills required as well as the ability to carry out the necessary administration side.

Interestingly, Bradley was often the interviewer who landed clients with troubled pasts, including criminal backgrounds. According to colleagues

at **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON**: 'He takes them at face value, and encourages them to pursue the fresh start they deserve. He always remains calm and is completely unflappable.'

Bradley certainly has an uncanny ability to extract information one doesn't expect to supply. While interviewing him, I inadvertently began answering his questions. There is an immediate rapport and trust. This is an invaluable skill for an interviewer who is talking with volunteer seekers.

'Most of those I interview are young, students and new migrants. People's motives are different but at the end of the day they all want to give back to the community in some way. The work here is interesting, varied, challenging and rewarding too. I'd recommend volunteering to anyone.'

Post Script: Soon after this interview **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON** was called on to give an oral reference about Bradley's work as an interviewer. He now has full-time work with the Ministry of Justice. He is on the way to accomplishing his mission. ■

STORY BY MICHELLE GUEST



‘It’s interesting, varied, challenging and rewarding too. I’d recommend volunteering to anyone.’



RISE, MINISTRY OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

No work experience? no problem!

FRANK CHEN's motto in life is 'If you don't try you'll never know'. And it's a philosophy that has really paid off since he first arrived in New Zealand six years ago.

Frank left his parents in North China at the age of 17 to attend Porirua's Aotea College as an international student. 'When I first came to New Zealand, I knew how to say 'Hello', 'Goodbye', 'I am hungry' and not much else!' he says. 'And although I boarded with a Chinese family, they spoke Cantonese and I spoke Mandarin.' It was a challenging time.

However, thanks to the English classes provided by the College, Frank's language skills steadily improved. After a successful year's study, he headed to Victoria University to gain a Bachelor of Commerce degree in Money and Finance.

Towards the end of his degree, Frank started considering potential career options – and that's when he faced his next big challenge. Apart from some cleaning jobs at university, he had no real work experience. He quickly realised this was going to be a significant barrier to achieving his career goals.

Undeterred, Frank approached **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON**, and was offered a position at the **ROYAL NZ FOUNDATION FOR THE BLIND**. One day a week for several months, he worked on a range of fundraising activities which included the annual Red Puppy Appeal. 'My boss, Grant Verhoeven, taught me a lot and it was a great opportunity to learn more about New Zealand culture,' he says.

Grant, the **FOUNDATION**'s Regional Fundraising Manager, was equally impressed with Frank's positive attitude. 'He was able to pick things up quickly, take responsibility and work well with others.'

Frank's hard work was to prove worthwhile when he subsequently secured a paid position as a Support Officer at the Ministry of Social Development. Out of 26 people interviewed, Frank was the first to be offered a position. He has also featured in a cover story on migrant volunteers in Rise, the Ministry's flagship magazine.

There's no doubt Frank has come a long way since his arrival in New Zealand, and he is convinced that volunteering has played a big part in his success.



RISE, MINISTRY OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

‘I feel really satisfied that my voluntary work experience has paid off.’

‘There are a lot of similarities between the work I did at the **FOUNDATION** and what I do now,’ he says. ‘I feel really satisfied that my voluntary work experience has paid off.’ ■

STORY BY MARISA KING



Volunteering builds people skills

OLLIE GOULDEN aged 21 has found volunteering an interesting and ‘formative’ activity during his post adolescent years. A former student of Tawa College, where he shone at science, biology and physics, he then decided to study IT at Whitireia Polytechnic

‘I didn’t see myself doing this as a career,’ he said recently. The next year was spent ‘floating – hanging out with friends, that sort of thing’. And then, looking for more community life involvement, he decided to volunteer.

A position as an interviewer at **VOLUNTEER PORIRUA** suited his desire to interact and build people skills. ‘I’ve learnt how to go beyond any assumptions I may have. And I realize how different people are from diverse cultures – this has been a great eye-opener.’

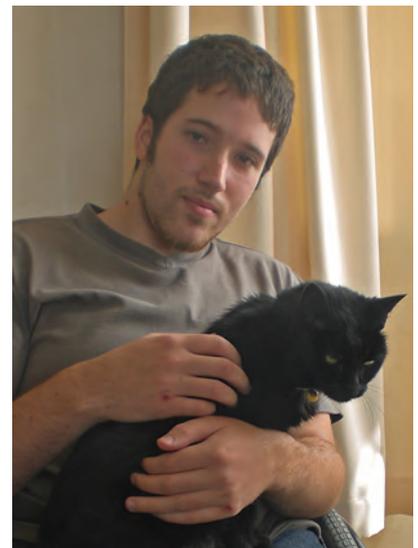
Ollie said that before taking on the interviewer role last year he tended to doubt himself. Now, having matched up many people with positions in the

voluntary sector in the course of his weekly volunteering roster, he says ‘maybe I’m not so bad as I thought!’

With this new-found confidence and motivation and to further test himself – and his desire to find a career direction – Ollie took on a second volunteering role last year. This was at a local kindergarten in Tawa. He was following a hunch that because he enjoyed being with children, he could also work with them.

Being in a wheelchair was a great ice-breaker, he said. ‘The children asked heaps of questions about it – and completely accepted the fact that my way of getting around is on wheels.’ The assignment was so successful that when the head teacher suggested he take up Early Childhood studies, he decided to move ahead with the challenge. So it is back to Whitireia and full-time study.

‘I’ve come full circle and I’m happy with my direction now.’ ■



‘I’m happy with my direction now.’



BRANKA CIGAK

Versatile skills and new networks

MAUREEN ZAYA has learnt much about New Zealand through volunteering roles she has taken on since arriving here in 2001. She has also gained satisfaction from helping people and being valued; and found that volunteering can be a stepping stone to a permanent job.

Maureen is an Assyrian from Iraq, who arrived with her parents and four sisters via Jordan. Their cousins had been killed in the ongoing war and life was becoming increasingly difficult.

The Assyrians are believed to have descended from the ancient Assyrians of Mesopotamia, who controlled a vast empire stretching from Egypt and Anatolia across Mesopotamia to western Iran in the 7th century BC, and were one of the first peoples to adopt Christianity. In their recent history they have suffered considerable hardship due to religious and ethnic persecution.

‘Everything is different in a new country,’ Maureen said. ‘You leave behind a lot of memories, your friends and your history and it’s especially hard for the older people. You start from the beginning – behind zero.’

Maureen is versatile and outgoing. She achieved a Diploma in Agriculture from Baghdad and later ran a cosmetic and accessory business for eight years. Her first job here, after a six-month’s English course, was in a Child Care Centre. Four years later she studied travel and tourism.

Then she was introduced to **CHANGEMAKERS REFUGEE FORUM** and as a volunteer she was introduced to a new set of skills – mainly associated with administration. Later this role become a paid position until there was a funding cut and, because of her commitment to **CHANGEMAKERS**, she became a volunteer again.

Through this connection she is now involved with the 2000 strong Assyrian community, arranging outings, travel around the country and other cultural events. A regular Assyrian language spot on **ACCESS RADIO** is also very important. ‘The older people especially like it.’

Her current paid work is as a ‘request co-ordinator’ with **INTERPRETING WELLINGTON**, a position which involves arranging for interpreters in



BRANKA CIGAK

‘In a new country you start from the beginning – behind zero.’

70 languages for hospitals and a range of other agencies. And according to her employer, Christine Goodman, when she noted Maureen’s impressive volunteering work on her CV, there was no doubt ‘she would be on the short list’. ■

STORY BY ROSANNE ROBERTSON



Computer expert adds capacity

CHRIS STREATFIELD is a community activist whose voluntary work spanned a number of decades before he came to New Zealand in 1998. In his list of involvements you'll find underground newspapers, several collectives and co-operatives, a women-in-manual-trades organisation, and some years working with the International Civil Servants Association in Geneva.

Early years were spent in the construction industry, where he was a builder and engineer. At the age of 40, when his doctor recommended 'I either give up building or end up in a wheelchair', Chris switched to IT. In line with his continuing interest in new information he studied seriously, obtaining a degree in computer science.

As volunteering has always been such an important part of his life, **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON** was a natural stepping-stone a couple of years after arriving in New Zealand. A stint as an interviewer gave Chris the background knowledge and understanding to move into a role where his passion, interest and skills were 'more at home': looking after **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON's** computers – and subsequent need for a database and website.

'I love to work with computers and my role with **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON** as IT specialist gives me the opportunity to be challenged and to respond to challenges.'

Since that initial volunteering assignment, many other community groups have claimed a piece of Chris's technical expertise – and energetic generosity.

THE SAFE FOOD CAMPAIGN, YWCA, TE OMANGA HOSPICE, LITERACY AOTEAROA, VOLUNTEERING NEW ZEALAND, MOTOR NEURONE DISEASE ASSOCIATION, the TOKELAU ISLAND GOVERNMENT and several other volunteer centres around the country, have had websites developed and maintained by Chris. And once an IT dialogue begins, questions – especially from the uninitiated – flow thick and fast! 'The voluntary sector is extremely challenging due to lack of technological knowledge and lack of money.'

Chris Streatfield continues to offer his skills and knowledge where there is need and parlous financial situations. Capacity building and professional IT systems are the result.



‘I learn things all the time.’

Perhaps the saying 'a man who loves his job never has to work a single day in his life' is true of Chris, who has recently added something new to his *curriculum vitae*: rescued penguins in Wellington now have a spa pool to swim in before being released, thanks to his work with the **NATIVE BIRD RESCUE WELLINGTON TRUST**. It's back to a spot of building, in between the IT work. ■

STORY AND PHOTOS BY DIEM-TRINH LE



Volunteering and walking together

EVELYN CHURCHILL was born in Tawa, went to Tawa College and her favourite subjects were music and English. She is congenitally disabled and wheel-chair bound; but quickly added during her interview at **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON** a quote from Scott Hamilton, an Olympic Gold Medalist who said ‘the only disability in life is a bad attitude’.

She has been living for two years at Maddison in Karori, a home giving support to residents with disabilities. She wants to work as a receptionist or an administration assistant but employers always doubt her capacity to handle phone calls and customer service tasks.

However a year ago she was introduced to **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON** by a friend who ‘recognised her disability but emphasised the possibilities too’. The ‘possibility’ she took on was interviewing, a task she carries out every week conscientiously, methodically and with a good blend of humour and earnestness.

‘I enjoy volunteering since it gives me an opportunity to meet people, get to know them and network with them,’ she says. ‘Otherwise I spend my time on the computer or watching TV, which of course is not a very good thing to do.’

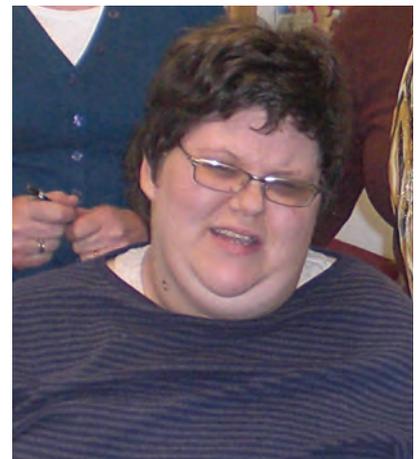
Her skills she is developing through interviewing are going a long way towards her goal to be an administration person. ‘I have good telephone manners – I would be a good administrator.’

During my interview with Evelyn I was reminded of what happened a few years ago at the Seattle Special Olympics. Nine contestants, all physically or mentally disabled, assembled at the starting line for the 100-yard dash. At the gun they all started out, not exactly in a dash, but with the relish to run the race to the finish and win.

All, that is, except one boy who stumbled and fell and began to cry. The other eight heard his cry, slowed down and paused. Then they all turned around and went back. One girl bent down and kissed him – ‘this will make him better,’ she said. Then all nine linked arms and walked together to the finish line. Everyone in the stadium stood and the cheering went on for 10 minutes.

When Evelyn says she will continue to volunteer in the future, it is this desire to walk together, be a part of the human network and contribute. ■

STORY BY SUKANYA KANARALLY



‘I have good telephone manners – I would be a good administrator.’



MICHELLE GUEST

They bring a little sunshine

CATHY LIEW has worked at the **VINCENTIAN HOME AND HOSPITAL FOR THE ELDERLY** in Berhampore for 11 years. In the course of her important work as an occupational therapist, she also coordinates the volunteers who add so much value to her varied role. With a team of 14, and 50 residents, it's easy to see that Cathy hardly had time to fit in such extras as this interview.

When a volunteer makes contact with Cathy, she talks with each one individually, assessing their skills and how they will add to the recreation programme. 'I had the idea at an OT conference in Melbourne. Over there they use heaps of volunteers. They have become a hugely valuable resource to me.'

Five of her volunteers are from **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON**. One is a reflexologist who comes in once a week to offer massage therapy and to chat.

The residents adore Sarah, a 20-year-old student of anthropology who plays 500 and bridge with the ladies. As part of her course, Sarah had to observe a group outside of her own demographic, so she chose the **VINCENTIAN**. She has continued volunteering beyond course requirements.

A Taiwanese ex-volunteer still visits the home twice a year 'just to pop in and keep in touch,' Cathy says. 'She came to us originally to practise English, but she was an excellent violinist. So she played for the residents. They loved it.'

Cathy also adds how ethnically diverse her volunteers are. 'Japanese, Chinese, Thai, Italian, German – they come here to practise English. The residents get to talk to someone for an hour when we just don't have that time.'

Although the volunteers are mostly women, there are men too. Most are young. They are given the chance to use their skills in a recreational role, or to develop English as a second language.

For the residents they bring a little sunshine; and to Cathy Liew they're an invaluable human resource. They allow the luxury of focus, making it possible for her to deliver one-on-one programmes. 'Volunteers make it possible for individual needs to be met – that's their absolute value.' ■

STORY BY MICHELLE GUEST



MICHELLE GUEST

• Volunteers make it possible for individual needs to be met – that's their absolute value. They are a hugely valuable resource to me.'



From scrap to sculpture

TREVOR MASON started planning his retirement 10 years ago. His aim was to keep himself occupied through painting and songwriting, as well as getting involved in community volunteer work. His biggest dilemma however, was narrowing down the options from the 50 volunteer jobs he liked the look of when he went to visit **VOLUNTEER PORIRUA**.

He chose a three-day-a-week volunteer position at **TRASH PALACE** in Porirua and says 'it is as if I have found my roots'.

TRASH PALACE is a Recycling and Education Centre that was initially set up to create employment opportunities for mental health consumers. It continues to provide this service, as well as employing paid workers and more recently, volunteers such as Trevor. All manner of household goods are dropped off by the public and then resold on site or stripped down for scrap metal merchants.

Trevor's position in 'Creative Waste' started three months ago and allows him to do various tasks, such as make

sculptures or displays out of household goods brought in by the public; as well as lending a hand at 'whatever needs doing'.

He is full of creative plans for **TRASH PALACE**, a place he describes as a 'moving feast'; organising social and educational events and inviting artists and musicians is one of his new ideas.

Trevor's working background is a far cry from his life at **TRASH PALACE**. He spent more than 30 years in the public service, predominantly in management training. He appreciates the 'collegial management style at **TRASH PALACE** as it gives people working here the opportunity to try out new things and sway with the wind'.

He says he gets home and raves about the place to his wife. 'She said to me one day – *There's more to life than Trash Palace!* – and I just smiled at her and thought about how much it nurtures me on so many levels. It makes me a better person to be around and thankfully she agrees!' ■

STORY AND PHOTOS BY NICOLA TOD



‘It makes me a better person to be around.’



The freedom of commitment

JERRY SPARKS majored in philosophy and politics. He is a postie by profession, employment which gives him time to carry out the 'philosophical and political' side of his psyche ... making a difference through volunteering.

Twice a week after his postie round, he comes to Volunteer Wellington, interviewing, listening, helping people to develop their potential more fully. He did a short stint of library work for a few months, and despite being a more lucrative job, missed having the freedom of daytime hours in which he could choose what he wanted to do.

'So it was back to being a postie again,' he said. 'I wanted to network more with different people and contribute to the community – I missed that contact in the confines of an academic library.'

Ronald Reagan once said: 'No matter how big and powerful government gets, and the many services it provides, it can never take the place of volunteers.' Jerry sees volunteering as a responsibility if one is to be a citizen in the fullest sense of the term. 'Citizens are partners in civilisation and volunteering is a primary opportunity to create needed change.'

At the time of this interview Jerry, had been volunteering for a couple of years (with his few months out to try the library job). Now he intends to continue with two different **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON** assignments, plus work in a local **CITIZENS ADVICE BUREAU**. Green politics is likely to come into his volunteering picture as well.

As an interviewer of volunteer seekers, Jerry is impressed with the people from different backgrounds and ethnicities who use the community sector as a way of exploring the NZ workforce. 'They may be international students needing experience, or extremely qualified in their own countries – but they are prepared to change direction and learn something new. This is a stepping stone which has a lasting impact on their lives.'

Volunteering is about the freedom of commitment – and Jerry has found that this often surprises people. 'If they work with an enthusiastic, passionate organisation they will never forget the experience.' ■

STORY AND PHOTOS BY SUKANYA KANARALLY



‘I wanted to network more with different people and contribute to the community.’



ALAN WICKENS

Talking Marama's greatest asset

MARAMA RANGI worked in a call centre for four years. She had married young and had three children who were growing up fast. But the work was unfulfilling. 'I was not able to extend myself. I wanted to be with people. My health was beginning to fail.'

So in her mid-30s Marama became a social work student at the Wananga o Aotearoa. Porirua born and bred, proximity to the campus (old Todd Motors) was easy. There was a change of pace though. Time to spare. 'I didn't want to start sitting around, getting bored. I set my mind to finding out about volunteering positions which would give me new experiences while I was studying – and be useful to the community.'

Once she was in the Volunteer Porirua loop she heard about a foodbank and advocacy role with **WESLEY COMMUNITY ACTION** in Porirua East. Finding that the work was 'not just about the food' but offered a full service dealing with people's reasons for being there, Marama realized that this was exactly what she wanted.

Now co-ordinator of the foodbank, she is there three times a week fitting her rosters around part-time youth work and her ongoing studies. 'I've learnt heaps. I meet new people from diverse cultures all the time. This has given me different perspectives about how to listen and how to communicate. I keep telling people about how much I enjoy volunteering and the knowledge it's giving me.'

In fact talking – and in a very appealing way – is probably one of Marama's greatest assets. She has the ability to enthuse others and encourage them to try something new. 'I keep saying when people come in to the foodbank, you need work experience and you need a work ethic – trying volunteering. And I tell them how the first time I looked on Volunteer Porirua's database I went ohmygod, all those organizations out there supporting the community – more than 50 in Porirua alone I think. That's what so many people need around here, to be involved and motivated and find out what's out there.' ■



ALAN WICKENS

‘You need work experience and you need a work ethic – try volunteering.’



Volunteering tests her capabilities

FONG FONG MA came to New Zealand four years ago to study for her Masters Degree in business management and human resources. From He Nan Province in the North of China she went through a disenchanted phase in those first months in New Zealand.

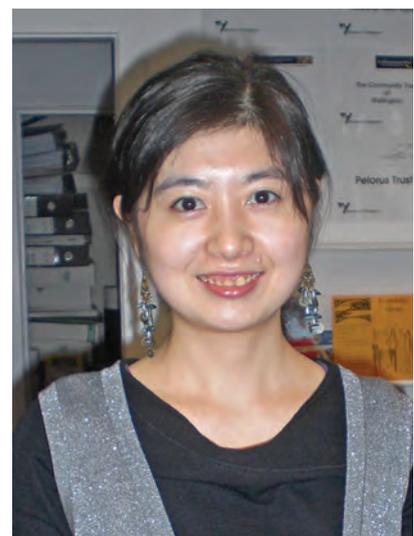
‘I didn’t know how to open up my social circles and felt sad because I was always getting to know other international students, and then we would say goodbye because it was time for them to go home. I was not learning anything about Kiwi culture. I was unsure of myself and full of self-doubt.’

She met people from **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON** at a Victoria University Careers Fair, and when they talked enthusiastically about all the options available, she felt that such work could be an answer to her dilemma. But she also added that at first she felt working for no money was the last thing she wanted to do. ‘I had spent much money as an international student – volunteering sounded a bit weird at first. Once I began though (Fong Fong was a member of the **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON** interviewing team for almost a year), I realized this was the most valuable thing I would be doing while in New Zealand.’

Fong Fong’s charm and assurance have become a trademark of her interviewing skills. Hard to believe she was so lacking in confidence when she began. ‘I wanted to test my capabilities and see myself in a different place from the university and always being with students. Now I can honestly say I am a different person.’

Interviewing was a challenge as it meant finding very diverse people appropriate roles in the community sector with any one of **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON**’s 370 plus members. But these are the people who created this ‘other side’ of Fong Fong Ma, who says she is now more optimistic and sensitive about other people – ‘and I find that people are nice!’

Whether her session was difficult or straightforward, she said she always felt she had accomplished something. She enjoyed the different conversations; an exploration she felt of the depth and breadth of the community sector. ‘I would observe their thinking and use different approaches for different people. I always felt happy doing this work. The experience was better for me than many of the part-time jobs I could have taken on.’



‘I was not learning anything about Kiwi culture. I was unsure of myself and full of self-doubt.’

After this conversation, Fong Fong was returning to Shanghai where an employment possibility in management was waiting. Her capabilities have been tested. No more self-doubt. As one of her team-mates said at her **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON** farewell ‘your smile is worth a million dollars’. ■



Volunteering has career rewards

CLAIRE TEAL freely admits that volunteering is in her genes.

Currently manager of the **WELLINGTON CITIZENS ADVICE BUREAU (CAB)** in the central library, Claire's volunteering career goes right back to her days as a 12-year-old, when she helped her teacher mum run end-of-year camps and classroom activities.

'It's in my personality – I like to help and contribute,' says Claire, now 28. 'I have an immense passion for the voluntary sector and what it can achieve.'

Claire's voluntary experience includes hospital work, residential care-giving for teenage girls in statutory care and providing homework support for migrants and refugees. But it was volunteering at **CAB** which led to her current role.

At the time, Claire had completed a Masters degree in Social Work and was also in paid employment, but her desire for a new challenge, and a chance meeting with the **CAB's** area manager, led her to apply for the job.

Claire now manages 53 volunteers in a centre that is open six days a week

and handles hundreds of enquiries a month. Her role is extremely diverse and includes supporting the volunteers, organising rosters, communication, administration and strategic service development.

However, Claire's involvement in the voluntary sector doesn't end there. A year ago she joined **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON's** Board of Trustees in a voluntary capacity. Claire attends monthly meetings to discuss the organisation's strategic direction and also participates in sub-committees responsible for corporate volunteering and publicity and stakeholder relationships.

'In addition to my past experience as a volunteer and volunteer manager, being on the Board has given me a better understanding of how strategic decisions are made and the relationship between management and governance,' Claire says. 'It's really "completed the circuit" in terms of my experience in the voluntary sector.'

Claire is also passionate about providing greater recognition for volunteer managers and encouraging young people to move into leadership



'I have an immense passion for the voluntary sector and what it can achieve.'

roles. 'Young people and leadership go together,' she says. 'All we need to do is ensure there are attractive opportunities for them.' And should they need any further inspiration, you could say Claire Teal is the ideal role model. ■

STORY BY MARISA KING



LYNNE HARDING

Fulfilling a lifelong dream

MARGIANA CULLINAN's works as a teacher aide at the **PORIRUA ACTIVITY CENTRE** represents the fulfilment of a lifelong dream. And it all began with a visit to **VOLUNTEER PORIRUA**.

Margiana is a woman of many talents. With qualifications in visual arts and beauty therapy, her career has included stints as an aerobics instructor, health consultant and even a special effects maker for the movie, King Kong. But she has always been interested in working with teens.

After an 18-month stint in Australia working as an assistant beauty salon manager, Margiana returned to Porirua earlier this year and began a computing studies course at Te Wananga o Aotearoa. It was while studying that she saw an ad for volunteers. 'I'd just been telling a student in my class how I'd always wanted to work with teenagers. The ad mentioned there was a role here at the **ACTIVITY CENTRE**, so I thought I'd find out more.'

Margiana went for an interview at **VOLUNTEER PORIRUA** and soon after began volunteering at the Centre. However, Centre Director Latu To'omaga quickly saw her potential and just

weeks into her placement, offered Margiana a paid teacher aide position for four days a week.

The **PORIRUA ACTIVITY CENTRE** provides an alternative education for at-risk teenagers. Margiana's role is to assist the Centre's teachers and work with its 19 students as they complete their correspondence studies and participate in other activities, such as art classes and sport. It's a challenge she relishes.

'I just love it when you see a student's confidence grow; it's like a light bulb going off in their head,' she says. 'I really feel like I'm meant to be here – it just flows.'

Margiana, who has her own 14-year-old son, is now looking to pursue tertiary studies in working with teenagers. And she has a message for anyone out there who is on a benefit and not entirely sure of what the future holds.

'The key to becoming financially independent is just to get out there,' she says. 'Voluntary work will often lead to something else – I'm a prime example.' ■

STORY BY MARISA KING



LYNNE HARDING

‘Voluntary work will often lead to something else – I’m a prime example.’