



# Once upon a time...

STORIES ABOUT VOLUNTEERS  
AND VOLUNTEERING

VOLUME 3



**Volunteer Wellington | Te Puna Tautoko**  
A CATALYST FOR COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

# Introduction

**Volunteer Wellington's** mission of diversity and inclusion are seen more clearly than ever before in Volume 3 of *Once upon a time ... stories about volunteers and volunteering*. And this time around, we've begun to talk about another dimension – the importance of management and leadership of volunteer teams. This is the key to making volunteering happen well ... and happily.

Of course volunteering also takes place spontaneously and can be as simple as an act of bending over and picking up a piece of litter or helping someone very old and infirm to cross the road. But more and more people want to be engaged with well-managed volunteer programmes; and work for a cause they are already, or can become, passionate about.

Volume 3 has included the beginning of a series of stories which tell something of the skills, creativity and extraordinary flare of those who manage and inspire volunteers. They are the ones who ensure the experience is rewarding. They are creating the legacy for the future.

And through the volunteers' stories a thread will be picked up, of how the management of their positions has led to a positive impact on their lives, which whether they are still volunteering or not, will stay with them forever!

It's that 'forever' that we are after. The nature of volunteering is that it can be a phase in life, a time of transition, or a long-term answer to a desire for work-life balance. Managers need to understand these differences; and be flexible as well as thorough. Whatever the motive, everyone is contributing to society. Everyone is making a difference.

A strong, connected community life happens as a result of these 'priceless' ingredients – effective leadership/management of volunteer programmes ... and therefore rewarding and exciting volunteering.

Thank you all for telling your stories, both those who are volunteering and those who are managing volunteer programmes. Different angles and elements will resonate with different people. That's life, and we are grateful to experience so much of it through working with you all at different times and in different ways.

Thanks too for contributions from volunteer writers and photographers Jennifer Monk, Sukanya Kanarally, Cecile Lepage, Sahiban Kanwal, Sarah Julianne, Tim Ganly, Andrew Finau. Sue Hobbs of minimum graphics has created the design which has added so much to the quality and attractiveness of the final publication. Thank you Sue. And to Roshni Prabhu for setting the production process in motion. That's the spark always needed to move the publishing journey into a finished product.

We are grateful to our principle funder who has made possible Volume 3 of *Once upon a time* – Family & Community Services of the Ministry of Social Development. Other contributions which assisted with the writing and production of the stories during the past three years have come from the community development divisions of Porirua City Council, Hutt City Council and City Communities of Wellington City Council.

Our appreciation too, to The Colour Guy for another great print job.

*Note: These stories are a snapshot of the thousands of volunteers and managers of volunteers who come our way every year. It would be impossible to tell everyone's story. We salute you all. And we look forward to producing Volume 4 in which either you or someone you know or work with, tells a story.*

Pauline Harper and Julie Thomson

**Volunteer Wellington**

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# Volunteering: a smooth career shift

**PIPPA SANDERSON** is radiant when she greets me in her new office. The night before, the former volunteer fundraiser for **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON** spearheaded her first forum for **ARTS ACCESS AOTEAROA** which she joined a couple of months before as Community Development Advisor and Events Co-ordinator.

'Arts for All', the second in a series of gatherings discussing art space accessibility for disabled audiences, for whom Arts Access caters, was a success. 'We had to split the crowd in two as we weren't expecting that many people!', Pippa beams.

Pippa spent the past 20 years freelancing as a multimedia visual artist, teacher, and independent curator. After working from home, on her own schedule, the prospect of fitting into a rigid work environment was rather intimidating to her. Yet the unpredictability and the weariness of having to generate her own projects all the time pushed her to look for a full-time position. Relying on her project management and fundraising skills, she aimed to shift from the fine art side of the arts field to the community development sector. 'I love creating opportunities for people to meet and share resources,' she says.

Volunteering was instrumental in easing this transition. For a few weeks, she wrote funding applications for **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON** and acted as a mentor to the **REFUGEE SERVICES** fundraiser. 'The value I found in coming to **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON** was to experience the feeling of an unfamiliar workspace. Then the overwhelming flow of information



**“The value I found in coming to Volunteer Wellington was to experience the feeling of an unfamiliar workspace.”**

wasn't as scary when I went through my actual introduction week at work. I would really recommend it.'

Getting used to PCs (she uses a Mac at home) and to someone else's filing system was like a rehearsal. Another advantage she found in volunteering in a workplace – rather than her homeplace – was the opportunity to use her skills and be in a position to receive external feedback; something she missed as an independent.

During this volunteering time Pippa proved to be a 'good team player'. This observation gave Pauline Harper from **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON** plenty to talk about when she acted as her referee. Pippa was also surprised by the strong networking aspect which happens in a well-connected workplace.



'You almost can't help it,' she says. And it comes full circle as she is now encouraging her new employer to become a community member of **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON**. ■

STORY AND PHOTOS: CÉCILE LEPAGE

# Coming full circle

**BINNEY TERRY**, now **STRENGTHENING FAMILIES** co-ordinator for **WESLEY COMMUNITY ACTION**, feels that she is coming back to her roots: 'You see, I was brought up on a Marae in the Waikato, where it's all about embracing people and looking after them.' She describes her new role in Porirua as a 'linker' who helps families connect with health agencies.

After a career in District Health Boards and hospitals, in Australia and New Zealand, she is happy to have crossed over to the community side of the sector. 'This position came out of the blue. I didn't expect it,' she says.

She had been volunteering for a few months at the **WESLEY COMMUNITY ACTION FOODBANK**, a Methodist mission, when she heard about the opening in that same organization. 'That's where it all started!' She applied, and 'that was that! I was in the right place at the right time.'

Beforehand, Binney had been looking for work for two years. 'I was quite happy to even get a cleaning job. I don't mind dusting. It's part of everyday life. That's how I started working in hospitals actually.' But potential employers saw her as too qualified and were wary she would get bored.

Following the advice of her Work and Income case manager, she came to **VOLUNTEER PORIRUA** to find a role in which she could use her skills and knowledge. 'Volunteering had been at the back of my mind, but I had never acted on it.'



*"I was in the right place at the right time."*

She chose to hand out parcels at the local foodbank, a task which also involved communicating and supporting people with next steps and, on occasions, budget advice.

'I didn't know anything about **WESLEY COMMUNITY ACTION**,' she admits. But she soon found out that their vision matched her values. 'Wesley acknowledges people's strengths. We look at what is working and go from there.'

These days she recommends volunteering to friends not only as a means to find work, but also to enhance their wellbeing. Getting out to the Foodbank once a week for a couple of hours to interact with people was important for her self-esteem. 'People can become despondent and isolated when they can't get work.' ■



STORY AND PHOTOS: CÉCILE LEPAGE

# I found a home away from home in the volunteering world

**NEHA SAOJI** came to Wellington from Pune in India in 2010. She was entering a new phase of her life in more ways than one. An MBA graduate in human resources and a new bride she was leaving her home state of Maharashtra for the first time.

She flew alone to New Zealand to be met by her husband already working her in the IT field. 'I was beginning my married life and my professional life in a completely new environment,' she said one year later. It could all have been a nightmare. Then she grinned.

'Frankly speaking I found a home away from home.' The breakthrough came quickly when a friend suggested going to **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON** to find a volunteering role. The interviews which followed (Neha became such an enthusiastic volunteer that she came back for a further interview to find more positions) led to an interestingly diverse list.

**VOLUNTEERING NEW ZEALAND** started the ball rolling with an online social media role once a week working with Branka Cicak, the communications officer. Neha's husband gave her some IT advice and she was on her way. She set up a Wikipedia page for the organisation and continued to do weekly updates.

Next came data entry with **SCOUTING NZ**, HR work with **PRESBYTERIAN SUPPORT CENTRAL**, interviewing with **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON**; and later more data entry with **ARTHRITIS NZ**. Neha's week was full and all the time she was learning and meeting new people.

'The people and managers at every one of these places gave me a feeling of belonging. I always felt I was treated as one of the staff – properly equal.'



CECILE LEPAGE

**"I always felt I was treated as one of the staff – properly equal."**

Her CV was very short upon arrival; now she says it covers 'quite a few pages'. This evidence of a New Zealand working experience (demanded by so many employers) paid off with a part-time job fitted into the voluntary mix, with Adworx Media, becoming a full-time position at the time of this interview.

'The volunteering – especially with **VOLUNTEERING NZ** because of the social media work – got me my job,' she said. 'Once I'm used to 40 hours a week I will hopefully be able to come back to interviewing with **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON**. This was the most awesome thing I have ever done. Every person I met taught me something new – every conversation was special.'

Neha entered the paid workforce with more knowledge of the Wellington community than most locals. Other involvements during her full volunteering career were one-off projects which included work



CECILE LEPAGE

with **WELLINGTON CITY MISSION**, International Volunteer Day and a promotional expo at **MASSEY UNIVERSITY**. She put her skills and heart into these positions. 'There is no difference in effort from a paid job,' she said. 'Maybe more space to enjoy and learn – and feel supported by the people around.' ■

# Learning on the job at Old St Paul's

**RUPERT WEBB** arrived in Wellington from the Cotswolds in England armed with degrees in Mediterranean history and classical civilisation. He headed straight for the archives housed at Te Papa and began the 'mindblowing journey' of learning about the history of New Zealand.

'I'm interested in all history, so I'm loving delving into this complex combination of living and past situations.' Then 'to get out of the house, meet more people and gain new skills' Rupert decided to volunteer. This practical step took him to **OLD ST PAUL'S CATHEDRAL** where, at the beginning of 2009, he became a tour guide – a position blending his love of history and desire to talk to people.

'In the beginning I was a bit nervous about speaking to large groups, but with practice I'm becoming more confident.' Passengers from cruise ships, travellers and random visitors are coming to this iconic historical building in Murphy Street every day.

'It's fascinating and rewarding. I'm learning on the job and developing promotional ideas at the same time.'

The other half of Rupert Webb's volunteering life is working as an archivist for six hours weekly at **BARNARDOS**. 'More experience and more learning about New Zealand's rich history,' says Rupert.

Searching through boxes and boxes of past publications and newsclippings



**"I'm gaining more experience and skills all the time. And I'm having a good time while I'm waiting for the right job!"**

– the goal is to collate salient information for the organisation's 40th anniversary.

It's an interesting week for Rupert, with many threads of local history being joined and articulated while the hunt for paid work continues.

In this time of economic recession, when all employment is limited, let alone when one is as specialised as an historian/archivist, Rupert is not despondent. 'I'm gaining more experience and skills all the time. And I'm having a good time while I'm waiting for the right job!' ■



# Learning the 'lie of the land' in a new country

**PHILOMENA NZIRAMASANGA** came with her husband to Wellington in February 2012. Very quickly they both followed up on a suggestion to volunteer and immerse themselves in local activity. When we interviewed Philomena some months later, it was easy to see that she now had the confidence of someone who has learnt the 'lie of the land' in a new country.

From Zimbabwe, for 20 years Philomena ran a clothing factory in the country's main city Harare. She began from scratch, first teaching herself to sew for her children and gradually moving on to pattern design, acquiring contracts and eventually employing more than 20 staff members.

She closed her factory the day before she left to come to New Zealand. 'We were looking for a new life and as we had already lost most of our saved money with the economic and political decline of Zimbabwe we were prepared to start afresh.'

Finding paid work would be difficult she realized. To learn about local communities she came through **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON's** interview process. **DRESS FOR SUCCESS** was the first position which appealed. 'It was with clothes which I love but very different from any of my previous experiences. The training and the people I am meeting has completely transformed me. By dressing women and preparing them for job interviews, I am making people happy.'

As a 'dresser' she talks with those referred, most of whom are unemployed, about the type of job for which they are being interviewed, sums up their style and size; and then they go to the clothes racks and the search begins.



PHOTOGRAPHS: JENNIFER MONK

*"By dressing women and preparing them for job interviews, I am making people happy."*

'I dress about five women each week and all are different. I have worked with all sizes, shapes and ages, and many nationalities. And every one of these women becomes more confident and happy as they find an outfit which suits them.' What is even better is that a high percentage do get the jobs they are after!

**DRESS FOR SUCCESS** has been Philomena's launching pad (the training was 'very fantastic' she said) which has now led to three other voluntary roles in this transition period of her life. A natural flow-through effect has been working as a window dresser and retail assistant with the **RED CROSS SHOP** in Newtown. Again, her greatest satisfaction is influencing, suggesting and supporting someone to purchase clothes which are going to make them happy.

Another day is spent giving English tuition to an elderly Chinese woman through **ENGLISH LANGUAGE**



**PARTNERS.** Further sewing work is taking place with a group of Somali women under the auspices of the **WELLINGTON SOMALI COUNCIL.**

This project includes introduction to sewing for some and for others, how to draft their own patterns. Happiness is following Philomena wherever she goes.

'I will find paid employment eventually but in the meantime I am learning so much, and adding something of value to people's lives.' ■

# Building confidence – and responsibility

**MAKERE SCIASCIA**'s career as a builder has shifted its shape as a result of volunteering with **HABITAT FOR HUMANITY**.

Initially he was faced with inconsistent work contracts due to the fall-off in the building industry. A Porirua local and not one to sit around getting bored, Makere talked with **VOLUNTEER PORIRUA** and found out about **HABITAT**.

He enjoyed the work and was impressed with the organisation's impact – not just locally but on the world. Since 1976, he found out, **HABITAT** has been working towards affordable housing, providing shelter for families in need, all over the globe. Through donations of money and materials, volunteer work and an efficient policy structure, more than 500,000 homes have been built over the years. 'This proves,' said Makere, 'that a little bit of help can go a long way.'

Later, needing to complete community service, Makere again made contact with **HABITAT**. Volunteering with a positive organisation rubbed off! Makere's enthusiasm and can-do attitude were noticed by his employers and he was asked to take on the position of Volunteer Manager/Builder at a couple of **HABITAT**'s work sites.

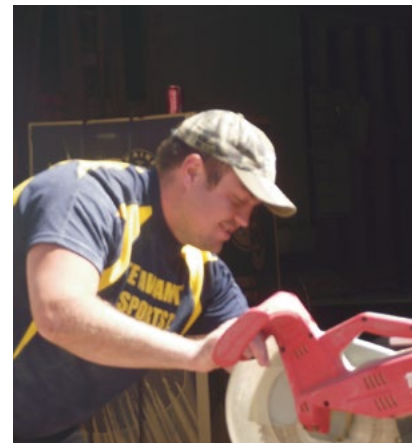
Makere is passionate about his work and is grateful for the opportunity which opened up as a result of his enthusiastic volunteering. 'I really enjoy interacting with the many



“The beaming smiles on their faces when volunteers see what can be achieved at the end of the day, is great.”

volunteers from diverse backgrounds who are involved on our work sites. The beaming smiles on their faces when volunteers see what can be achieved at the end of the day, is great.'

His volunteers are not the only ones to have 'beaming smiles'. Makere also has a great grin. 'I am really happy and content and I enjoy helping volunteers reach their full potential.' He speaks from the experience of knowing how 'getting stuck into something worthwhile' can change people's lives around. He had a happy volunteering experience and now he is making sure others do too. ■



STORY AND PICTURES ANDREW FINAU



# A passion for managing volunteers

**ALISON CRAFAR**'s blend of logic and intuition has evolved over her 20 years as a manager of volunteers. And it's her passion. 'Volunteers,' she says, 'are the most valuable human resource there is.'

Alison is the manager of volunteers with **MARY POTTER HOSPICE**. She works with 500 core volunteers and another 500 for one-off events.

The position fell into place at the right time in her life (a move from Tauranga with her family two years ago); her experiences and knowledge perfectly ordained.

After a stint in asthma education, she managed Adult Education classes run through Taradale High School. Then, when it was decided to establish a volunteer service for a new hospital in Hastings, to combat the negativity which can surround the choice of a predominantly rural location, Alison got the job.

Unenviable at first, but she soon turned it into an extraordinarily successful and enterprising programme. 'I started with no volunteers and within two years had a team of 300. My role was to write all the associated policies, ensure all staff were on board with the volunteer team, overcome initial barriers and hurdles.'

With first advice coming from Volunteering Canterbury, she had a sound platform for future training and ways of establishing communication channels with staff and managers from top to bottom – and of course her ever increasing volunteer team.

Respecting 'the added value to all services' which volunteers were providing and ensuring that paid staff were never replaced with volunteers, were early edicts. Feedback quickly flowed from patients and their families. People were happier about coming to hospi-



PHOTO MARY POTTER HOSPICE

“...the most valuable human resource there is.”

tal. 'Meet and greet' (the name of the programme) became an identifiable, acknowledged and much praised service.

'Patients reported their positive experience with volunteers. They were our best advocates.'

At **MARY POTTER HOSPICE**, Alison's principles remain the same, although her team numbers have grown and times have changed. She puts more emphasis on flexibility to accommodate so many full-time workers. Her training includes wonderful stories ('people never forget a procedure or a policy when it's explained through a story') and communications are stronger than ever. 'All staff and volunteers know about new volunteer intakes and great volunteer achievements. Older volunteers, some in their 80s, are as excited about new teams as the day they began maybe 20 years ago. Keeping all levels of staff teams informed really well is top of my list.'

And in her most recent intake, Alison received the best compliment she could



hope for. 'As part of each new group's training, I ask why they have chosen to volunteer with our organization. This man said he had chosen **MARY POTTER HOSPICE** because the management of volunteers was so important to him.' Her passion and enthusiasm have paid off.

Also Alison has been an active volunteer since her teenage years. She knows the difference between good and bad management of volunteers – and the difference it makes to the experience. ■

# Volunteering part of daily life

**LIQIN MI** from Xi'an, China, always wanted to try volunteering, but thought of it as something she might only do when she retired. She arrived in New Zealand in 2009 as a skilled migrant and quickly realised that volunteering would be a great way to gain experience and help her grow her skills. She got in touch with **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON**, and since then volunteering has become an important part of her life.

Liqin had several reasons for volunteering. She wanted to feel included in society, use and develop her skills, and, most importantly to her, contribute to her new country. 'Volunteer work helps me build and expand my network, and also gives me experience in the New Zealand working environment,' she says.

Her volunteering began as an interviewer, matching up candidates with volunteering positions at **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON**. She recalls one interviewee who was particularly down on her luck. 'After 45 minutes her attitude had changed. I helped her feel good about herself. I inspired her.' Experiences like this have given Liqin the passion to keep volunteering.

Teaching English to an elderly Chinese couple, working as the secretary of a community organisation and helping to launch the **CHINA TRADE ASSOCIATION** Wellington Branch are among Liqin's other volunteering efforts.

**DRESS FOR SUCCESS** has been another recent new volunteering experience. This organisation provides professional attire to disadvantaged women. For Liqin, working there was a natural step. She has been a client of the organisation herself, and she's proud to



*"New Zealand is a very fair society."*

contribute in return. 'New Zealand is a very fair society. I want to help others the way I've been helped.'

Not long ago, Liqin started a fixed-term contract at **STATISTICS NEW ZEALAND** as Asian Community Liaison for the 2011 census. She attributes her success in no small amount to volunteering. 'It gave me experience working with people from different ethnic backgrounds, especially Asian people – mostly migrants.'

Advocating volunteering is something Liqin actively engages in. 'I encourage my friends to do volunteer work,' she says. 'It's a great way to meet people, develop skills, feel good about yourself, contribute to society and eventually land a job. There are lots of benefits.'

Despite the new job, her aspirations to volunteer are unabated. She hopes to work with **NEIGHBOURHOOD SUPPORT** in her local community. She also



continues to help at the Mandarin language corner for the **NEW ZEALAND CHINA FRIENDSHIP SOCIETY** when she can.

For Liqin, volunteering has become part of daily life and not just something for retirement. ■

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHS TIM GANLY

# An ear for listening

**EMILY-ROSE REID** has an ear for listening; something she does a lot of in her role of four years as a **YOUTHLINE** volunteer. She spends about five hours per week taking calls from young people who are seeking advice or just a kind ear to shoulder their problems. **YOUTHLINE** is a free phone service for people of all ages who want some support and counselling.

In her last year of high school, 21-year-old Emily-Rose worked for **KAPITI YOUTH SUPPORT**. Transitioning to **YOUTHLINE** was a natural next step. Emily-Rose was always impressed with the wealth of knowledge and support available for young people – if they knew how to access it. This knowledge of support services has been valuable in her current **YOUTHLINE** role.

Training before her first phone call was thorough and although she felt well prepared, she says it was nevertheless ‘a bit nerve-wracking’. Calls generally fall into three categories: regular callers, parents calling about their children and people talking about family, friends and intimate relationships. ‘And every now and again something takes you by surprise!’

Emily-Rose talks about the rewards of volunteering. ‘It offers a lot of amazing opportunities to meet people with a common interest. Through **YOUTHLINE** I have made some very good friends.’ She adds that the experience and knowledge gained has enabled her to grow as a volunteer, as well as in her work and personal life.

She has also had a chance to explore new skill sets with her recent involvement in the selection process and training of new volunteers. This has meant being on the interview board, five nights of further selection



“Through **YOUTHLINE** I have made some very good friends.”

followed by a weekend camp. For those who are successful, they then spend a further 10 nights of training covering topics such as grief, suicide, relationships, health and abuse.

Emily-Rose now supervises a group of **YOUTHLINE** counsellors. ‘I am very excited by this new role and being involved with new teams and a different focus.’

Emily-Rose completed her studies at Victoria University of Wellington last year, majoring in English literature and Spanish, and is now working full time as a Project Administrator for Project Skate. Funded by the Ministry of Social Development, Project Skate visits primary schools to raise awareness of skating sports and how to keep healthy and active. She leads a hectic life with volunteering, working, playing netball and learning Te Reo. Travel to Spain and South America are included in her plans for the future. ■



# Retirement is a breeze for the likes of Kantilal (Ken) Patel

**KANTILAL (KEN) PATEL** arrived in New Zealand as a young Gujarati lad with very little English. 'I could read and write mind you, but (it was) hard to understand what people were saying.'

University followed night classes and then came 'lots of jobs' in finance and accounts. At the same time, Ken had begun to enter the varied world of volunteering, and these are the positions which became his passion; and which have now bequeathed to him a vast knowledge of the community. Not to mention a very happy and fulfilling retirement.

'My mind is always ticking and clicking,' says Ken. Stories about people who come his way, and others who hear about him and ring for guidance or advice made for lively conversation with this man in his late 60s. Ken's busy – and obviously rewarding – volunteering life consists of a line-up of impressive roles which have emerged and grown over the years.

Firstly he became involved with committee work focused on his own Indian community. Secretarial positions and Board of Trustee positions later led to governance representation with a number of different ethnic organisations – Samoan, Chinese and Pacific communities. Always the desire, he said, to support minority groups ... help them find their feet.

When Ken Patel became a Justice of the Peace in 1997 the pace was on. Word quickly got around about his genial personality, and his aptitude for listening to people's problems and quietly finding the right direction.



**"My mind is always ticking and clicking."**

Requests for his time and knowledge escalated, but so did his enjoyment of the varied people he now keeps seeing all the time. 'Every day different different requests ... different different people.'

Ken's generosity and ebullient sharing of time have led to a number of awards. Included are the Queen's Service Medal, the Absolutely Positive Wellingtonian award (2005) and several gold medals and excellence awards from his home country India.

Apart from 'freelance' Justice of the Peace and also marriage celebrant work, Ken now volunteers several times weekly as chief receptionist for **SECPHO** (South East and City Primary Health Organisation Trust) in Newtown. As he said when we first began our conversation 'my mind is always ticking and clicking'. ■



# A gentle ambiance is added to the hope centre

**CELIA DERBY** has been playing the piano since she was a 10-year-old growing up in Stokes Valley. She was committed to practice and study and continued learning until she had passed Grade V111. It is this love of music that has taken her through many of the ups and downs of life.

Celia has taught the piano and for some years played keyboards in a rock and roll band called The Roadsters. During recent years she has become unwell. She talks openly about the anxiety which has put a stop to much of her past work and meant 20 years on an Invalids Benefit.

Although she mentioned that 'this is very, very hard financially', she emphasised that her main need now was to be productive 'instead of doing nothing worthwhile with my time'.

Volunteering was suggested, and through **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON**, Celia gathered up all the strength she could muster and approached **THE HOPE CENTRE** (run by the Salvation Army) in Newtown. This is an organisation dedicated to giving support to those who often live on the margins of the community. Here, trained councillors work with people with addictions, give budget advice and look to the delivery of food parcels. It is also a place where people can meet up, play cards, take a shower and have time out.

After being referred to **THE HOPE CENTRE**, Celia discussed possible roles with managers Ollie and Kathleen, and, as luck would have it, a donated piano arrived on the day of her interview. 'Yes, I could play the piano,' said



**"Yes, I could play the piano ... now I've fallen in love with The Hope Centre."**

Celia Derby. She grins recalling this coincidence of some months back.

'Now I've fallen in love with **THE HOPE CENTRE**. I come once a week. Kathy has said I can choose my times and if I suddenly can't come that's fine too. But I'm committed to my one hour with the occasional break.'

Feedback from the clients has been more than satisfying. Her playing sometimes even encourages others who have dropped in, to have a go and make music themselves. But we'd talked enough. Celia was eager to get back to the piano. She begins to play and there is no doubt that a gentle ambiance is added to a place which is fresh and inviting to all; and which she calls 'a sanctuary'. ■



# Volunteer work must have purpose

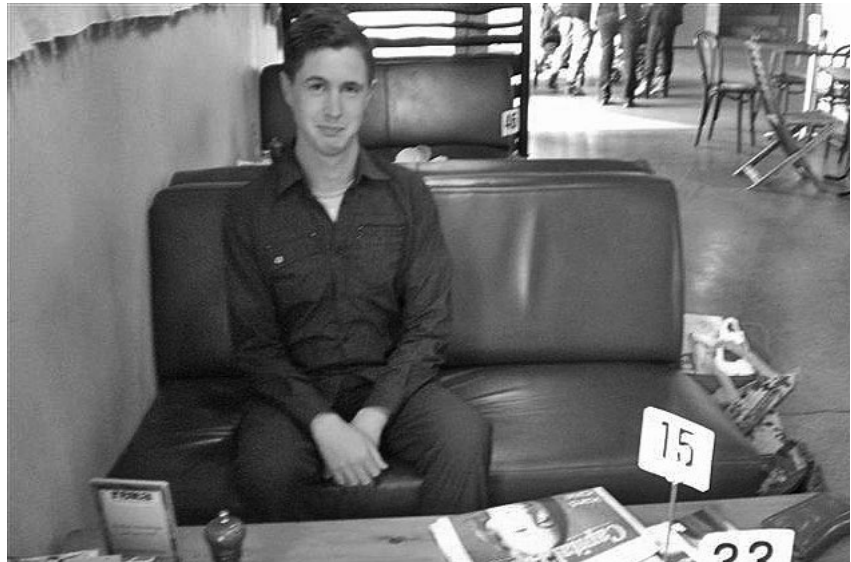
**CALEB SMALLFIELD** likes to be in a position where he can support people – and he wants that position to be interesting. ‘There are times when paid work can be repetitive and boring, but there is the recompense of a pay packet at the end of the week. Volunteer work has to have purpose and be well managed, so that people know where they stand and how they are making a difference. Then they will be committed.’

Caleb’s voluntary experiences began after gaining a degree with a double major in political science and history from Victoria University. While he was looking for employment ‘with a pay packet at the end of the week’ he reckoned volunteering as an interim step would be the way to go. He found a role, relating to his history major, in a ‘historic place.’

His mother Brenda, a long-time volunteer with both **CITIZENS ADVICE BUREAU** and **VOLUNTEER HUTT**, reminded him there were plenty more positions around. And although his first experience was frustrating, Caleb did realize that through volunteering he would be given opportunities to express his capabilities.

A follow-up position with **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON** came next. This is the process in which all volunteer seekers are telephoned in order to find out ‘how things are going’. Has the position worked out? Are your skills being developed as you had hoped? And, above all, did the community organisation ring you back when you made your first enquiry about the role?

Caleb is not a naturally talkative young man and telephone work can be daunting. But he quickly found during

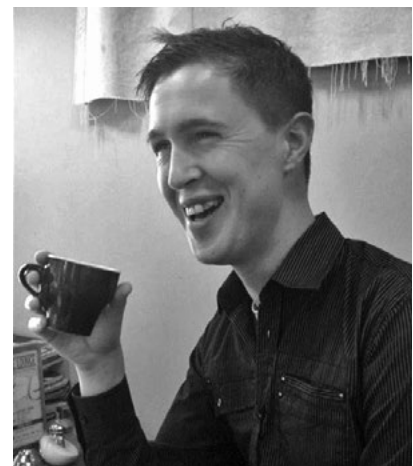


“In every place where I have volunteered I have learnt something.”

his initial introduction that people were always nice. ‘They never seemed to be bothered by me. They were happy that we at **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON** were interested and often this process gives them another chance if the first step hasn’t work out.’

He added that he did feel upset when he heard the cry ‘we never heard back.’ This is so disappointing, such a let down to people’s initial impulse to volunteer, he said. However, he sees the follow-up system as a security phase. **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON**’s obvious interest is a way of retaining people’s enthusiasm; and opportunities are there for another interview conversation.

During his year of follow-up work, Caleb talked with hundreds of volunteer seekers. Success stories were luckily the highest percentage of the outcomes he observed. ‘One was even



the happiest person I have ever talked to. He had just got a paid job that day ... and as a result of his volunteering.’

In his ‘time of transition’ other volunteering undertaken by Caleb was production work with **HUTT RADIO** (106.1 FM) and dealing with a youth survey project. ‘In every place where I have worked I have learnt something.’ ■

# Leadership of volunteer programme 'privileged position'

**LOUISE FOOTE**, co-ordinator of the volunteer programme at **KENEPERU HOSPITAL** in Porirua, didn't deliberately set out on a career path to meet an end. However, many of her activities and varied positions to date have led to what she now describes as a 'privileged position'.

She talks exuberantly about the role she has been in for three years. Employed part-time under the **WELLINGTON HOSPITALS 7 HEALTH FOUNDATION**, she ensures her focus on her huge team of volunteers is organised, inclusive and welcoming.

To touch base with this diverse group regularly – 'one of the most important aspects of the role,' she says – she is always in on Mondays. For the rest of the month, day two will be consecutive days of the week. 'I therefore am able to meet up and talk with every volunteer at least once a month.'

She has a strong 'buddy' system in place which enables new volunteers to continue training until they feel confident working alone.

The mission of the volunteer programme is to meet, greet and guide visitors to the hospital. There are always two to three smiling faces near the entrance. Walking through the doors of such a vast institution can be overwhelming. As I sat near the reception foyer talking to Louise, people approaching the labyrinth of directions, relaxed visibly when contact was made with the friendly 'guides'.

Others from the team will visit patients who may be lonely, isolated or anxious and therefore in need of a visitor who is sensitive, a good listener – and has the luxury of being able to spend time with someone. 'Such encounters



“... all part of the healing process.”

definitely lead to a happier outlook – all part of the healing process.'

Louise Foote's career began with work as a doctor's receptionist. 'I'm familiar with the health sector – and I love it.' Other co-ordination positions followed and always volunteering has been threaded through her life. 'I know how it enriches people. That's probably why I now love working in this organising and training capacity.'

Proud of her multi-cultural team, Louise has many stories to tell. For example when a woman from Romania came forward to join the team, shy about her lack of English, Louise felt she had the qualities she always looks for – compassion, sensitivity, a bright smile, the ability to listen. 'I emphasised that she could stay with her buddy for as long as it took for her to be confident. Then, one day when visiting a ward with her buddy, the patient in particular need of companionship at the time happened to be Romanian. Everyone was happy!'



And this volunteer quickly made great strides with her English and was able to move on to full-time employment.

Always aware of people's motives, and always finding ways to build new communication pathways which acknowledge both the work of her team and make sure they are a force with which to be reckoned in the hospital, Louise Foote's programme is dynamic and growing. It is adding memorable moments of value to the lives of thousands of people who pass through the hospital ... and who cover all shades of health, wealth, anxiety and hope. ■

# Volunteering makes passion a reality

**LAURA COATES** is 24 and graduated last year in architectural design. Work in the industry was sparse so she looked to **VOLUNTEER PORIRUA** to find a volunteering role in her field, somewhere she could gain work experience and confidence.

As providers of affordable houses for low-income families, **HABITAT FOR HUMANITY** was an obvious choice. Gill Burns, **HABITAT**'s Operations Manager, needed a series of architectural drawings to be completed. The timing was perfect for Laura. She had a project, a mission, a deadline – and was gaining on-the-job experience all the time.

Other projects have followed. One was working on a site with a housing project in Cardiff Street, Porirua. This work introduced Laura to new aspects of the building trade. Her next assignment was to assist with the design of two new houses to be built at Ascot Park. One of these houses is currently going through Council's housing consent process. The other is in the early planning stages with work being done in partnership with Bunnings.

All these projects are adding grist to Laura's mill – her need for building and design experience. 'When you're at university you never really design a house. It's all about theory and technical aspects. Working here with an organisation like **HABITAT** you're getting an amazing overview which includes good, straightforward design – and being able to witness the families' joy. You're seeing the difference these houses are making to a family's entire life. The impact is astonishing.'



“Nothing will happen if you don't put yourself out there.”

Originally from Nelson, Laura has always been interested in design. However, until she actually experienced the practical side of her profession she was still unsure ... and lacking in confidence. Now that she has been involved with the designing of her first house through **HABITAT**, she has found how much she really enjoys the technical and compliance aspects.

'Nothing will happen if you don't put yourself out there. I thank **VOLUNTEER PORIRUA** for giving me the opportunity to be involved in something I am passionate about.' ■

STORY AND PICTURES BY ANDREW FINAU





# Young sole parent on way to stable career in social work

**CELINA KAINUKU** is a determined young woman who, since the birth of her baby boy, has followed a path of hard work and good will to help her accomplish her forward-thinking goals.

'The first door that opened,' she said during a recent interview, 'has been volunteering as an advocate for **WHARE TIAKI MAORI WOMEN'S REFUGE**.'

Celina wants a stable income for herself and her son. She's a sole parent so these early years of his life are important for gaining the experience, skills and knowledge which will lead to her ambitions to be realized.

Social work in the community sector is her longer-term vision. Right now, using well the opportunities coming her way are uppermost in her mind. 'I am passionate about the value of this work and have learnt quickly from my volunteering, the rewards inside myself when helping someone in need.'

Ten weeks of training preceded her work on the crisis team with **WHARE TIAKI**. Through **VOLUNTEER PORIRUA** and with this layer of experience under her belt, she approached **PORIRUA LIVING WITHOUT VIOLENCE** to carry out administration tasks. When a full-time position opened up, dependent on additional income being raised by the organisations, Celina found out about the Skills Investment Scheme run through Work and Income. The scheme delivers a salary for 30 hours work weekly for six months.

'Jaqui Edwards of Porirua Work and Income is behind me 100 per cent. With great employers and a positive learning environment, I'm achieving a lot.'



SARAH JULIANNE

"With great employers and a positive learning environment, I'm achieving a lot."

Celina talks about the accounting package MYOB, like an old mate – 'I had no clue what any of this meant before. Now I'm adding business and finance to my list of things to learn before I study social work specifically.'

Her colleagues, Teina and Tracey at **PORIRUA LIVING WITHOUT VIOLENCE**, are generous in always being prepared to share their knowledge, while at the same time impressing upon her how always to work 'in a professional manner'.

As Celina talks enthusiastically about her dedicated employers, it is clear that their influence and support, for both herself and her son, are major steps toward the development she is seeking so avidly. ■



SARAH JULIANNE

# CAB volunteering has a 'big effect'

**PAOLO LIM** arrived in Upper Hutt from the Philippines three years ago. He was then 20 and had just completed his third year studying business and economics. With a visitor visa only he decided to wait until the whole family had permanent residency before returning to university. In the meantime he wanted something useful and interesting to do.

His mother had already set the **CITIZENS ADVICE BUREAU** ball rolling. She was offered full-time employment just as she was about to begin the five-week training. The Lims are a versatile and volunteering aware family. Paulo, who had already done some driving for **AGE CONCERN**, stepped into the breach and became Upper Hutt **CAB's** youngest bureau worker ever.

Most of his co-workers were in their 60s and 70s. Their energy interested Paulo and 'because older people in New Zealand often dye their hair' he had a hard job placing them in an age category anyway! The work was 'an eye-opener'. Issues could arise from relationship troubles, to law problems, to finding a telephone number.

'That sense of knowing we were helping people from all ages and all sorts of backgrounds is very powerful. They have somewhere to go to talk about their difficulties – whether big or small – and no one is judging them. That has a big effect.'

Paolo was also impressed with the way older volunteers took on the switch from indexed paper lists of topics to web-based systems. 'They certainly liked having me around to ask for support when there were difficulties;



PHOTOGRAPHS: JENNIFER MONK

“... customer service in all its extremes.”

but they were determined to take on this new knowledge.'

Whether young or older, Paulo sees this gaining of knowledge and experience as one of the great outcomes from all volunteering when the management and training for the role is effective and supportive. This able and seemingly very confident young man did confess to being 'very nervous' when he first began his **CAB** rosters. 'In fact I was dreading the telephone ringing. Would I understand the caller, would they understand me?' (*Paolo's English is flawless but a strong Kiwi accent can be exceedingly difficult to comprehend for a newcomer.*)

There was always a 'buddy' for the face-to-face conversations. And finally he did get used to the accent of his new homeland. Selection for his current full-time administration role with the Ministry of Social



Development is another illustration of the impact of volunteering. He had done several casual work assignments but what stood out on his CV, he was later informed, was his **CAB** experience – 'customer service in all its extremes'. ■

# Community spirit alive and well at Kilbirnie Salvation Army Shop

**HASENA ZORA, CRAIG HUTSON AND IAN HILL** represent the strong team who make the **KILBIRNIE SALVATION ARMY SHOP** tick. From manager Craig's point of view, the shop has two objectives ... community spirit and development, and commercial viability.

When Craig first came across from the Wellington store to Kilbirnie, then about to become a stand-alone operation, he could see there would be more responsibility and workload for the five existing staff.

'That gave me the scope and reason to expand our volunteer base.' Hasena is one example of his ability to be a creative forward-thinker. Her son had worked in the shop a couple of years ago (now he has paid employment); so as soon as his mother arrived in Wellington as part of the New Zealand Family Re-unification Scheme for people with refugee backgrounds, he introduced her to Craig.

She had a depth of business experience in Iraq but very little spoken English. The trauma of displaced family life as a result of the war added to difficult beginnings. 'When I first came here I was crying all the time,' she said through an interpreter. 'But since I've been at the **SALVATION ARMY SHOP** I am happy again – smiling and laughing.'

Hasena's outgoing, lively personality conveys her pleasure at being part of this well-functioning team. Staff all help with English words. 'I learn as much here as I do in my class.'

Items are labelled with English phrases and descriptions and Craig keeps introducing new tasks and new possibilities. They joke a lot – especially as he adds a few Arabic words to his own vocabulary. Hasena adds that the staff has become like her



**“Since I’ve been at the Salvation Army Shop I’m happy again.”**

family. She looks forward to arriving and being included in the shop's welcoming environment.

Craig, aged 30, sees his role as manager of a team which includes a number of diverse volunteers as a more interesting – even challenging – career than if everyone were paid. 'Then it's just straightforward HR practice,' he said. 'With volunteers we have a responsibility to our local community, to ensuring we understand why they are here and making sure we respond to these motives.'

'Often people are really struggling and they have no chance right now of getting paid work. We will make sure they can purchase things here at good rates maybe to help furnish their homes – that sort of thing. And we make sure they are getting the skills development they are looking for.' This could be training with using the till, presenting window displays, general life skills and communication.



'You can't be rigid with this sort of management – or you don't grow yourself. We miss out if we don't talk more to each other and find out about several different views.'

More customers come into the shop. Hasena's bright smile, as she greets them, says it all. ■

# The stops and starts of the journey to work

**PAVAN KUMAR** says cheerfully that after 10 years he is happy to claim New Zealand as his 'adopted motherland'. But his journey to the destination of an interesting, worthwhile job and sense of belonging to a community has had its share of obstacles and challenges.

From Hyderabad in central India, a native Tamil speaker and fluent in four other languages, Pavan arrived in Wellington almost by default. It was 2001, the year of the September 11 crisis, and he was unable to obtain a UK visa. The world was paranoid about anyone from the sub-continent.

The other side of the world, where he did have some friends, became a feasible option. With a BA in mathematics and an MA in arts and literature, plus experience as a medical transcriber, Pavan already had an impressive list of qualifications. He was employed for a time in a PR role by Spartan Engineering where he made good New Zealand friends. 'But it's easy to stagnate,' he said. 'Making the right choices for our own development has to be a priority.'

Unemployment struck around 2005. The job market was tight as the global recession moved around the world. A business course with McGirr Training followed and this 'magically' led to a temporary position with ANZ Bank. Next came a computer course during which Pavan began his volunteering journey.

'I became involved with the beautiful people of **ARO VALLEY COMMUNITY CENTRE** and helped to organise their 'rumble in the jumble' fundraiser. In the course of the work I met Celia Wade-Brown (network building is part of the



*"My experiences ... have led me to this fulfilling work which I love."*

volunteering scene). This contact, plus a great verbal reference from the coordinators, helped me land a job with Orcon, an internet service provider.'

However his division's move to Auckland was not possible for Pavan. His need to remain in Wellington resulted in a further spate of unemployment; and again a suggestion from a Work and Income case manager to take on a volunteering position.

The role he took on was with **WELLINGTON SOMALI COUNCIL**. 'This organisation and the work I was doing was making a very big difference to a lot of people who had suffered trauma and, as with people with refugee backgrounds, are often alienated from mainstream society.'

As he learnt more about the needs of the community a paid position opened up. 'I was in the right place at the



right time and was offered the role. It's about advocacy and community development and I feel it is my experiences up until now that have led me to this fulfilling work which I love.' ■

# Inspiring volunteers to build good houses

**GILL BURNS** has an architectural background as well as experience in property management and development. These are the right skills to carry out her deep-seated desire to improve housing conditions for 'humanity'.

After attending an AGM of **HABITAT FOR HUMANITY** – the worldwide community organization dedicated to the cause so close to Gill's heart – she joined up as a sponsorship and administration volunteer. After a few months this led to her becoming involved from the permanent paid staff end.

Now Gill Burns is the Resource Development Manager for the Lower North Island, aware from her own experience that besides building materials and adequate funding, volunteers are **HABITAT**'s major resource. 'It's their labour that makes the build happen; also they bring in the materials and they have the diverse skill base to cover all the eventualities which crop up during such complex projects.'

Providing low-income families with 'simple, decent, affordable' housing is the philosophy of **HABITAT FOR HUMANITY**. After meeting the criteria, a selected family build their home with the organization, supplying at least 500 hours of 'sweat equity' as well as being able to borrow the purchase price of the house with a no-profit mortgage. Volunteers and partner families are all then involved for the 'build', a process which takes about six months. The family who will live in the house are always involved with the whole build.

Gill has remarkable creativity around 'project overview'. She finds skilled



*"It's an amazing and always very motivated mix."*

volunteers to manage teams, to supervise and instruct, and she knows how to encourage people 'who have never held a hammer in their lives' to achieve. This could be a corporate group or an unemployed youth with a police record hoping to start afresh.

Her 'passion for good housing' encompasses an unerring ability to find the right role for the high numbers of diverse people who come her way. 'Nathan, who is a Work and Income client, came along looking for a way to both get involved and learn some new skills. He is now doing a building apprenticeship while volunteering with **HABITAT**.

'A surveyor from the Philippines, wanting to find out more about the New Zealand culture, built us a wonderful set of steps.'

Others Gill has involved in these ongoing building projects include students working on the Duke of



Edinburgh award scheme, minimum security prisoners 'able to stand tall because they've helped someone' and an architectural student who took on the role of assisting with site management.

'It's an amazing and always very motivated mix,' says Gill, 'with the trick being to make sure no one is standing around; volunteers want to feel they are engaged and contributing. Lots of volunteer supervisors are essential. ■

# Volunteering achieves inclusion, integration, independence

**KIM GORDON** remembers she is meeting me for an interview on Thursday at 9.30 am. She has a plan of action for nearly every week day and nothing is forgotten – although she appears not to rely on a diary. It's all in her head. This is 'cooking lunch day' at **THE NO. 1 TRUST** – Hutt Valley Disabled Resources Trust. Green beans are on the menu and with the group of three or four others, it's guaranteed to turn out well.

Learning to crochet was yesterday. Next Wednesday, as on every second Wednesday, Kim will have caught the bus from Upper Hutt and she will be volunteering for the day at the **TE OMANGA HOSPICE SHOP** in Queens Drive, where she has been working for two years.

The 'ongoingness' of this role has given Kim the benefit of an extra family. It's different from work experience, which happens in short, sharp bursts, says case co-ordinator Jill Culy. 'By continuing in the same place for such a long time, you're really getting to know people, aren't you.' Kim then mentions being a bridesmaid and taking in photos to show her workmates at the shop. And her recent birthday, when they gave her a 'massive' bunch of flowers.

Kim looks younger than her 50 years. She's well organised and has great clothes – one of the advantages of working in a clothes shop!

Last year, with two friends from **NO. 1 TRUST**, Kim was interviewed at **VOLUNTEER HUTT** and found an additional position; and this involved the whole group. They were the catering assistant volunteers at **FRAGILE X's** two-day conference, with case co-ordinator Sina Irwin working



“The shop gave me a massive bunch of flowers for my birthday.”

alongside the team. Their past kitchen experience showed through and all were publicly complimented after the event.

This extract from the chairperson of **FRAGILE X** says it all. 'We would like to express our deep appreciation for the excellent work provided at our recent conference. Jerusha Simi, Kim Gordon and Jade Ruri were very punctual, well presented, cheerful and did an absolutely splendid job catering for the needs of our 90 conference attendees ... we would love to have the opportunity to use their services again and will certainly promote them to our colleagues in the community and professional sectors.'

These comments illustrate how such aims as inclusion, integration and independence are achieved through volunteering – in so many different ways. ■



# Getting a kiwi experience

**SHAMBHAVI MANJREKAR** wears the name of a goddess, and she certainly beams with radiant energy. At the time of this interview Shambhavi had only been volunteering at **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON** for one month. Yet she already knew the organization's ins and outs. No wonder: what started as a one day a week shift gradually turned into three days a week. Actually her motivation is such that you can find her around the office on most days! 'There's always something to do,' she says. 'The more you do, the more you learn.' One of her main learning curves, she feels, is that she has become a 'sharper listener'.

Her tasks include interviewing volunteer seekers hoping to find a volunteer opportunity. She has also taken on the following-up role which is a later communication with each person to discover how their efforts in the community sector are progressing. 'This gives us a clear picture of how we are helping them on their volunteering path. Their motives may be to balance up their paid work or to develop skills which will lead to paid work.' She likes the fact that her contribution is appreciated.

'It's already been a beautiful journey. It's like a family here. I get to interact with so many people and build a rapport with them. I help them get comfortable because they can be a bit suspicious. – or shy – at first.'

It may be because she is herself a newcomer to this country that she understands her peers' mindset intuitively. She left her native Mumbai and quit her position as an executive assistant to the India Times president



**“Finding a job here is like running a marathon!”**

last December, to join her husband in Wellington. 'Even before getting married, I was ready to relocate in India or abroad. I like taking risks,' she says.

Not at all inclined to lead the 'monotonous and idle life of a housewife', she immediately started looking for work. But 'finding paid employment here is like running a marathon! In spite of having a five-year experience with a well-known brand, a MBA in HR, and a valid work permit, all I have received so far are rejections,' she says.

So she is learning to be patient, and keeping her spirits high. And since she hadn't taken any time off in the past five years, she is enjoying the change of working environment.

'I understand New Zealand is a small niche market. Employers are looking for a kiwi experience or qualifications.'



Confident in her prospects and guided by a positive attitude, she intends, through volunteering, to get to know her new environment. So far, she appreciates people's honesty. 'I tell people that I am looking for work so that they can keep an eye out for me.' ■

STORY AND PHOTOS: CÉCILE LEPAGE

# Getting back on track!

**RYAN FLETCHER** has a calm, soothing voice. 'I will be your interviewer this afternoon,' he says to the older woman waiting in **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON's** lobby. Although the 18-year old is rather softly-spoken – he has to repeat himself before the woman acknowledges him – he has a quiet confidence. This is impressive when you find that Ryan until recently self-identified as antisocial.

'I dropped out of high school,' he says. 'I lacked a sense of direction and found it hard to deal with people.' He found his peers especially difficult and calls them 'judgmental teenagers'. After nearly two years of retreat and of 'just sitting around at home doing nothing', he decided to look for ways to make himself more hireable. 'I was terrified of jobs,' he admits.

In January he enrolled at McGirr Training to catch up on his studies and asked his Work and Income case manager about volunteering opportunities. 'He handed me a **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON** leaflet, so I checked it out!'

Five months down the road, Ryan says the volunteering experience is much more rewarding than he had ever expected. He came here to improve his CV and ended up restoring his self-confidence and building his communication skills. He has overcome his anxieties and pessimism: 'Meeting volunteers raised my opinion of people in society. They showed me that there are good people out there.'

Even his colleagues have noticed the change as he is not hiding behind his long hair anymore: one day he came in with a fresh fringe. 'So nice



**"Meeting volunteers raised my opinion of people in society."**

to see your lovely face,' said Faith, a fellow interviewer. 'The course and **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON** helped me get back on track,' he now states. Interviewing and placing volunteers have also bolstered his desire to study psychology and aim for a career in counselling.

Today, he is working towards his NCEA certificate and will be done by July, right in time to start the new semester at University. 'I feel the break I took was necessary for where I was at the time,' he says. 'Now, when I see my friends at Victoria University, I wish I hadn't taken it, but I'm on my way to joining them soon.' And he's adamant that he'll keep some time in his busy student schedule for a steady amount of volunteering. ■



STORY AND PHOTOS: CÉCILE LEPAGE



# Empowering through volunteering

**ALLY REID**'s career aspiration is career guidance; and she is already setting a great example in her journey by volunteering as a mentor alongside her current day job and career guidance study at University.

Ally has launched a mentoring and CV checking service through **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON**. 'Many people are looking for some form of direction. So motivating and inspiring and really getting people to see their strengths, that's my key focus.' With a degree in anthropology and living in a multicultural country, such as New Zealand is now, she wants to see everyone given a chance. 'There are a lot of people out there who don't know how to market who they are and what they do.'

When Ally reviews CVs she can often see why the person didn't get the job. 'For example a lack of attention in a CV to spelling and grammar has let the candidate down. And if they don't write about their talents and abilities, then the employer won't know.' There can be a cultural barrier; presenting and talking about achievements can be a hurdle. Ally wants to empower people by providing them with tools to achieve their ambitions.

Especially passionate about helping young people, who are currently facing a particularly high unemployment rate, she believes everyone – regardless of age – deserves a chance. 'I've mentored young people who have just left high school and encouraged exploring volunteering opportunities as stepping stones.'

If young people are able to secure a voluntary position with an agency who



**"I always encourage people to describe their dreams and aspirations."**

values, supports and mentors their volunteers this can often help build the experience critical for their CV; and gives them the confidence to talk about the work they have done.

Ally has also guided people recently released from prison and facing many barriers in their path to employment. 'A client I have just worked with now has his Heavy Traffic (HT) Licence, something he couldn't have done on his own because of his criminal background.' Using the right terminology and the correct channels to advocate on his behalf, Ally has secured the licence and the funding from Work and Income. Her client is now well on his way to paid employment.

In her experience, Ally has found volunteering is a valuable step to gain paid employment and enhance



career prospects. 'It is a move in the right direction for a lot of people. And you should aim as high as you can,' she says. 'I always encourage people to describe their dreams and aspirations.' ■

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHS JENNIFER MONK

# A journey to finding a career niche

**DAVID STUART** graduated from Victoria University with a degree in marketing after years of high achievement at Hutt Valley High. Harvard University had been in his sights ... 'the world was my oyster. I was confident and motivated.'

Then chronic fatigue hit and later mental illness. 'My confidence went to zero,' he said during an interview at **VOLUNTEER HUTT**. A 20-year journey of discovery and awareness has followed, with volunteering experiences being the pivot of 'new learnings and the rebuilding of confidence'.

David talks about **VALLEY TRANSITIONZ** now **EARTHLINK** and the springboard this organisation has provided for 'next steps'. First it was a volunteer placement with **TAKE 5**, whose mission is focused on arts and social programmes for adults who experience mental health issues. As part of the kitchen staff at **TAKE 5**'s base in Lower Hutt he learnt cooking skills as well as the art of hospitality. How to empathize and be a sensitive listener became part and parcel of this role.

Two paid summer contract jobs followed. These positions demanded attention to detail, he said. 'One was very challenging and the other was quite cushy.'

David was beginning to recognise that he was developing a skill base which involved communication and listening to others who needed support. He wanted more than 'a cushy job'. While volunteering with the **DISABILITY INFORMATION & EQUIPMENT CENTRE** he gave advice about the wide range of machines and tools available for people with disabilities. He knew that working in this sort of supportive environment was where his potential now lay.



PHOTOGRAPHS: DIANNA THOMSON

## "I want to see people thrive."

So it was a logical 'next step' to take up studies at WELTEC and learn more about how to become a support worker. This led him to a placement with **OASIS NETWORK**, a drop-in and social gathering space, again for those who have been involved with the mental health system.

'I want to see people thrive and I know by listening and being an objective ear, this can happen.' **OASIS**, situated in Laings Rd in the same building as **VOLUNTEER HUTT** is, as the name suggests, a peaceful place for people to relax, where there is not the intensity of the clinical situation and where they can build trusted friendships – with people like David. His title is now 'support worker' which essentially means peer support, he explains.

'People open up to me because they realise I do understand all sorts of mental health issues – I've been there. My experiences of the past few years



are now part of what I have to offer other people. This is valuable as it has given me back my confidence. Volunteering works.' ■

# A sense of community

**VANISA DHIRU** was exposed to a sense of community from a very young age. Her parents – originally from Gujarat in India – ran a dairy in Palmerston North and ‘helping out’ was part of life.

‘If anyone asked for help my parents would do it; they would give away products for raffles or community events, put up posters, never say no – that sort of thing.’ At high school Vanisa did her bit at a leadership level and then studied design and marketing. Her first job was with Trade and Enterprise.

Then those early influences of community connection and being part of a culture where giving was the norm, were pushing her to find a more balanced life style. When a couple of women suggested the YWCA and Vanisa heard they were looking for board members, something began to resonate.

‘I had no previous knowledge of governance but felt this would look good on my CV. I also wanted to create work–life balance and give back to society. As I became more involved with the **YWCA**, the cause took hold.’

Women’s leadership, marketing support with business enterprises, self esteem, body image were among the broad range of topics which make up the framework of the **YWCA**. Once she joined as a volunteer Vanisa Dhiru was fast becoming a zealous advocate for an organisation of which she is now the president.

During her school years Palmerston North society was not diverse. ‘As the only Indian at our school I did feel a bit weird at times, lacking in self assurance. Now I see so much value in the many cultures coming to New Zealand. My mission is to give women from diverse cultures opportunities and support through the Y.’



CÉCILE LEPAGE

“... the cause took hold.”

She has found that through volunteering people are exposed to different organisations, systems and experiences. In her early 30s and with voluntary work firmly ensconced in her lifestyle, she believes that the more we give the more we get.

For Vanisa the ‘getting’ has been about rapid and intense learning curves – and from both sides of the table, governance and operational. ‘There is a distinct line between the two,’ she says. ‘It’s important to understand these differences and manage both with a real understanding of the people with whom you are working, and their motives.’ For example being able to include in her CV, her Y governance role with its accompanying tasks such as international representation and public speaking events, has been a key selling point for interesting paid employment positions. Her recent appointment as executive director of Volunteering NZ reveals a successful career path.



Currently Vanisa’s volunteer hours are spent working with her Y team who are organising a fund-raising dress sale; which is also an opportunity for young women to buy beautiful dresses at affordable prices.

As her new ‘day job’ is now all-consuming, Vanisa has learnt to trust her volunteer team and ‘let go’ through delegation. She has found that young people want challenges and experience so giving responsibility and leadership tasks to volunteers, are among the best ways of rewarding and acknowledging their contribution. ■

# Brief encounters produce dynamic results at Kenepereu

**MARTHA TOOMER** and her fellow volunteer guides at **KENEPEHU HOSPITAL** immediately made me feel welcome – even comfortable, if that’s possible when entering the corridors of such a vast institution. I wasn’t a patient, so there was no associated fear factor, but my sense of direction is limited. Where was I going? This was all new to me.

Martha came from Colombia in 1982 to marry her Kiwi husband, who died two years ago. At the time she was working in departments involved with finance and human resources. She needed a change; finishing a Diploma in Business with the Open Polytechnic was a goal.

‘But I also needed to be around people – I had to do something more than just study.’ Volunteering had been in Martha’s mind for some years. Now she could see that it would be therapeutic, help her to move through the grieving process.

**VOLUNTEER PORIRUA** referred her to the **KENEPEHU** arm of the **WELLINGTON HOSPITAL & HEALTH FOUNDATION** volunteer programme. ‘Louise, the co-ordinator of the programme, was straightaway so welcoming. After I had signed the papers of agreement she took me around all the wards – making sure I was familiar with the people in charge of these areas – and began the explanation of what my tasks were to include.’

Mondays for Martha means being by the entrance door with others from her team, ready to direct, guide, reassure. The group is smiling but unobtrusive. It’s great to see relief written all over people’s faces when they know they



“There is no rush.”

can ask someone the way ... without feeling like an idiot!

Martha’s second roster of the week is a visiting day. This is the role in which she revels.

‘I love talking to the patients. My position is so privileged. Because of having the luxury of focus and time, I am able to get close to people for this brief encounter. There is no rush. People can tell me their whole life story if they want to.’

Which they often do. This opportunity to remember good times and loved ones does make people feel better, Martha believes. ‘There is a strong connection between the hormones associated with happiness, and recovery.’

Fifty-one volunteers are currently included in the group adding this intrinsic healing value to **KENEPEHU HOSPITAL**. Louise Foote, coordinator of



volunteer programmes, has future plans to increase these volunteer numbers so that eventually, every ward would be covered. Effects from such programmes go far beyond an initial head-counting statistic ... they are dynamic. The sort of moments people talk about long after they’ve left the hospital. ■

# Statistical role leads to connecting with people

**REVATI NANOTE**'s first six months in Wellington were often lonely and isolated. She enjoyed walking, the library, and cooking, but was hesitant about contacting locals.

From Indore in India, Revati has an MA in statistics and software development. She has lived with her husband and son in San Francisco and later stayed for a longer period in Mumbai. Her husband kept moving as he took on major IT contracts but as her son was nearing school age she preferred 'to keep stable'.

Finally central Wellington became the place of choice for the whole family. Her outgoing son began school with no worries about language or different accents. 'But I was too closed. Local people were friendly but I found it hard to understand the accent. When my son began school I tried to volunteer there. That was too difficult as I was afraid of misunderstandings and misinterpretations. The more hesitant I grew the more my confidence disappeared.'

Revati talks about those times. 'I would pick up the phone to speak – and then put it down again.'

Her decision to get involved came gradually with one positive step following the other. First she went to English speaking classes at **TE ARO COMMUNITY CENTRE**. Revati's English is actually very sophisticated and clear but the need to hear the mixture of kiwi accents was imperative. Then she went to pottery workshops at **VINCENTS ART SPACE**. Working with clay was both therapeutic and creative.

Next she met Julie and became involved with a statistics project for **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON**.



**"I feel connected with people."**

'Julie was so nice and I could understand her! I took home a series of graphs to build up an analytical report from the data. I was able to work freely and I was able to use my skills. I felt very much satisfied.'

Revati talked with real pleasure about the results of this first volunteering role. 'I was useful and getting appreciated. It was nice to meet people and be working together; and also to come in contact with the community sector. I am now comfortable with the people of New Zealand.'

After her move into volunteering, Revati's changed outlook was noticed straightaway by her young son Amey, she said. 'He looked at me strangely that day when we were walking home from school together. "Why are you so happy today," he said. "Have you bought a new dress or something?" I told him I am happy because I have interesting, useful work to do. I feel connected with people.' ■



# Striving for excellence – Laulotaha

**ROY ANDERSON** is recovering from mental illness, a process which, for him, means reaching out and helping people.

Among his visionary and far-reaching interests, is a desire to see young students excelling in the education system. When Roy took the step to find a volunteer role through **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON**, he was attracted by **WESLEY COMMUNITY ACTION**'s Laulotaha project – striving for excellence – with Tongan school students.

It's a mentoring/coaching position which takes place for 'two intense hours' every second Saturday at the Wesley Church Hall in Taranaki Street. Roy has been working with a year six design student supporting him with chemistry and maths.

While finishing his Masters and as a staff member of the University of Otago's Computer Service Centre he had his first encounter with the mental health world. The 'rebuild' began with steps towards ensuring a 'life less taxing'. But it wasn't long before Roy was again involved with further high-powered computer programme development which at the same time was contributing to his Ph.D. Further mental health episodes intervened and, now living in a Karori supported house run by **MASH TRUST**, Roy is again rebuilding his life.

The Laulotaha project is an important part of this journey. 'I like the way the whole family is involved. The Taranaki Street hall is packed with the fathers discussing topics relevant to their children's study, and the mothers preparing food which the students bring in to their tutors in the middle of the session. It's very nice.'



“The students learn, the volunteer mentors learn...”

Roy adds that he gains much satisfaction from seeing the students grow in understanding ... moving towards the goal of excellence set by the founder of the programme Valeti Finau. Her vision has been to have a strong team of mentors who will work with Tongan primary and secondary school students on a one-to-one basis on a number of subjects.

She was looking for people with a 'passion for challenge and innovation in education and who would walk a second mile with the child.' Roy is one of almost 40 'passionate and committed' mentors who have come her way during the past year, through **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON**. Valeti feels her targeted, well-structured approach with sound role descriptions and a comprehensive introductory interview, is the secret of the programme's success.

'Mainly professionals and third year university students the volunteer



mentors come for a look on the first night and then they're hooked,' says Valeti. Tongan hospitality, the family atmosphere of the educational evenings – and the fact that there are visible results, means that volunteers stay the distance. It may be a Saturday night but as Roy Anderson says: 'The students learn, the volunteer mentors learn – we're all about Laulotaha.' ■

# From volunteer to self-employed

**AMANI YOUNIS** has faced, over and over again, the same barrier that many new migrants encounter when they are looking for their first full-time position here. During the two and a half years since she has been in New Zealand (at the time of this interview), her applications have systematically been overlooked in favor of local or UK candidates. 'No one gave me a chance. I did not get one interview,' the disheartened journalist and TV producer from Jordan points out; although she did share many coffees with potential recruiters in order to network and discuss her situation.

Very early on, she knocked on the door of **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON** who directed her to **INSPIRATIONAL TV**, a Christian-based organization producing thought-provoking and spirituality-related videos. She shot two episodes for their 'Recipes for Life' series. These two five-minute encounters with individuals who cook a dish which, for them, embodies some crucial life lesson or symbolizes their life trajectory are little storytelling gems.

Eventually, she did find some part-time work in a Berhampore after-school childcare centre, helping out with kids and doing the dishes, but nothing close to fulfilling her vocation as a storyteller. That's when she decided to take things into her own hands and create her own opportunities. 'I'm not waiting for things to happen any more,' she says. She developed her director's idea of celebrating youth's accomplishments with an award ceremony. The Second Pride Awards show, for which she is the executive assistant, will be hosted at St James Theatre in December!



**"I could do wonders for other organizations as well."**

Thanks to her **INSPIRATIONAL TV** gig, she was contacted by **AGAPE**, a budgeting service which had been trying for several years to release a promotional video. Brimming with ideas, Amani wrote them a straightforward yet spirited script and delivered the material with the only charges being for the recording gear. 'They were so thrilled with the DVD that they came into our office with muffins as if we had done the video ourselves!' exclaims Pauline Harper from **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON**.

After this experience, it dawned on Amani that she could 'do wonders for other organizations' too. She is launching her own production company and is now looking to spread the word. ■



STORY AND PHOTOS: CÉCILE LEPAGE

# Building work-experience portfolio

**JUSTIN MEADE** has an extensive background in marketing with hotels, IT and a number of training groups. When severe arthritis hit in 2008 he was disabled to such an extent that he was unable to walk for eight months.

What does a young man who is brimming with ideas and capabilities do when faced with this sort of enforced inactivity? 'Well it was very frustrating,' said Justin two years later and enjoying a new flow of energy and plans after what he calls a phase of creative 'post-surgery rehabilitation'.

His first step after being struck with immobility was to study full time and complete marketing qualifications begun earlier in his career. At this stage he was grateful for support from Work and Income.

When the recession closed in on so many promising careers, Justin's mind was made up. 'I had always wanted to work for myself. Now was the time to do this – I became a Renaissance man, one of those people who re-invents themselves.'

He needed a head start though. Somewhere he could practise and re-gain lost confidence and lost ground. So he made an appointment with **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON** to see what was 'out there' in the volunteering world.

'The day before I almost cancelled. I was certain that all the positions would be home-help or something in that line. I was blown away when I discovered the volunteering opportunities available for highly-skilled people. Marketing roles, design, project planning, event organising, IT ... so many possibilities which are all



**"I was blown away when I discovered the volunteering opportunities available for highly-skilled people."**

invaluable for building up someone's portfolio of work experience. I now strongly believe that volunteering is a great way of opening doors.'

Justin took on a position with the SPCA assisting with the development of 35 new roles designed to build capacity throughout several facets of the organisation's infrastructure. He has also been working on a marketing plan for **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON's** Employees In the Community programme, re-writing conceptual material and working on other promotional strategies.

'We need to change the mindset about volunteering and encourage people to use and develop their skills with community organisations. Then they will have no gaps in their CVs if, for one reason or another, they have had



to leave the paid workforce. Also they are learning and contributing at the same time.

'I'm enjoying immensely this time of focusing on charitable organisations – I can't recommend volunteering enough.' ■



# Developing potential through volunteering

**CORA OWEN** and **REMYA RAJEEMENON** are from different parts of the globe; but their career pathways have many similarities with volunteering as a common denominator and their current destination **TAEAOMANINO TRUST**, a Pacific Health Service in Porirua.

Cora worked in accounting and auditing positions in the state sector for 12 years before moving to the United States where she lived for five years. When she returned to New Zealand, finding paid positions hard to come by, she volunteered as a board member with the **YWCA** and assisted with financial reporting. This work paved the way when a position opened up at **TAEAOMANINO TRUST** as finance and support services manager. Her passion for the values and culture of the Pacific has done the rest. 'I feel at home here working with a Pacific Island group.'

Remya arrived from India in 2010 with an IT background. Like Cora, her initial attempts to find work when arriving in New Zealand were unsuccessful. So then she too turned to volunteering – through **VOLUNTEER PORIRUA** – as a positive stepping stone along her career path. Cora was her point of contact for a role with **TAEAOMANINO**. 'I was impressed by her great qualification but also felt for her – there are so many hurdles for a newcomer ... our accent for one. I told her if she worked hard and gained experience things would unfold for her.'

And they have, says Remya. 'I am in the accounting field even though it is new to me, but I learn it quickly because of my IT background. I began in admin support and as a receptionist, and eventually I started accounts processing. The culture and people are very friendly so I feel very comfortable here'.

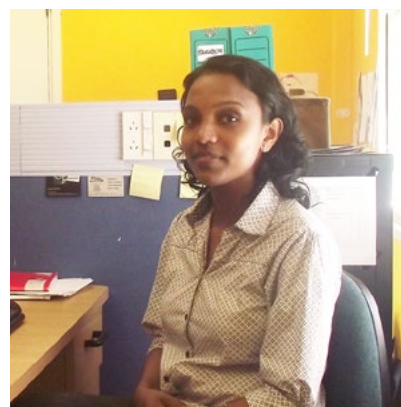


**“I told her if she worked hard and gained experience things would unfold for her.”**

Cora adds: 'I have a purpose! If I see potential in a volunteer who comes my way I want to nurture those skills to better whoever comes under my guidance. Remya has the right attitude – learning is knowledge.' Also she was in the right place at the right time and her volunteering has led to part-time paid employment with an aspect of volunteering included.

**TAEAOMANINO TRUST** has had a presence in Porirua for nearly 20 years. Its services target Pacific people in the region and offer specific programmes associated with alcohol and drug issues, child and youth mental health, family violence and therapy, gambling education and intervention, home-based support, GPs, Family Start, PAFT, school holiday programmes, youth and school-based social work services. ■

STORY AND PHOTOS BY ANDREW FINAU



# Establishing herself in the community

**SHIKHA MAHAJAN** believes in 'doing unto others what you wish others to do unto you'. She relates to the philosophy of karma but she's no sermon giver; rather she feels that the best way to establish yourself in a community is to immerse yourself fully in its culture. She came from India eight months before this interview, and since then she has certainly 'jumped right in'.

In India, 26-year-old Shikha's voluntary activities began in college where she volunteered in the National Service Sector unit which helped the under-privileged. She organised blood donation drives, AIDS awareness campaigns and, on completing four years as part of the Unit, she headed a group of 200 volunteers who assisted with the establishment of a school in Dahanau, a tribal area on the border of Maharashtra and Gujarat. Later work involved being a charity ambassador for Child Relief and You, an organisation dedicated to stopping child labour and child prostitution.

Most of her voluntary activity in India related to children, particularly those below the poverty line. 'They are often overlooked and neglected by the government,' she said. 'And it is the children who are the future of the country.'

Although the causes for her volunteering in Wellington are very different, the drive behind her 'do unto others' passion is similar. As a centre assistant at the **SEAFARERS UNION**, her brief is to make seafarers feel welcomed, 'especially when home-sickness strikes. I've come across seafarers from India and I've loved being able to talk to them in their own language whether it's Hindi, Marathi or Punjabi.'



*"I've loved being able to speak to the seafarers in their own language, whether it's Hindi, Marathi or Punjabi."*

For further involvement in her new home, she is currently training to become a **CITIZENS' ADVICE BUREAU** support person. This linked in with the making of a two-part radio programme with **ACCESS RADIO**. In the first segment she talked about the intricacies of support work with the CAB; the second segment was her take on the media and the Paul Henry debacle!

Shikha is also an interviewer for **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON** where her task consists of talking with potential candidates for the many different volunteers roles associated with their approximately 400 community group members. In the short time since she has been in New Zealand she has done more voluntary work than many of us would do in a lifetime. Here's to hoping she continues ... our society will be better for it. ■



STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY SAHIBAN KANWAL

# Doors open in surprising places during time of transition

**VIVIENNE PICKFORD**, from Wainuiomata and in her early 50s, left behind her work as a vet nurse during 2009. This interview took place fourteen months into her 'new life' as a multi-faceted volunteer.

'For years I'd seen ads in the Hutt News and always thought that's what I would like to do one day – if I ever get the time.' Now, in this time of transition training as a medical typist through an AUT on-line course, Vivienne realized she had to get out of the house. 'I was becoming isolated ... not having much contact with people.'

She arrived at **VOLUNTEER HUTT** and immediately loved the environment. Interesting openings were everywhere! She had always wanted to have more to do with horses so **RIDING FOR THE DISABLED** became her first experience. 'The horses were amazing and so were the children.'

Vivienne has also taken on interviewing at **VOLUNTEER HUTT** and in this position became aware of new volunteering opportunities as soon as they came on the database. One – and this of particular relevance to the career move she is planning – was to do medical typing for a conference run by **FRAGILE X**, an organisation dedicated to supporting people with genetic disabilities. 'A brilliant weekend working with this wonderful doctor from America – trying to keep up with interviews I was typing on a laptop.'

However, it's **HUTT HOSPITAL'S MEET AND GREET** volunteer programme which is proving an unexpectedly appropriate stepping stone for future paid employment. Vivienne is there for one shift every week. The manager of the volunteer team, Keshla Davies, is



*"I have been exposed to so many different situations. It's an eye-opener and very enriching."*

'just lovely' with a hands-on training approach, a great sense of humour and a structure which ensures the skills and motivations of all volunteers are understood and appreciated. As she met department leaders and managers in the course of her volunteer training, Vivienne has been surprised at the possible doors which can open.

'Through this new work I am being exposed to so many different situations. It's an eye-opener and very enriching.' Vivienne continued, that when people come in, usually anxious and worried or scared, it is great to know that the volunteers have the confidence and overall knowledge of the hospital to see both patients and visitors happily on the right track. The purpose for the cheerful **MEET AND GREET** volunteers at **HUTT HOSPITAL** is being achieved. ■

PHOTOS BY SARAH JULIANNE



# Host role suits Hao perfectly

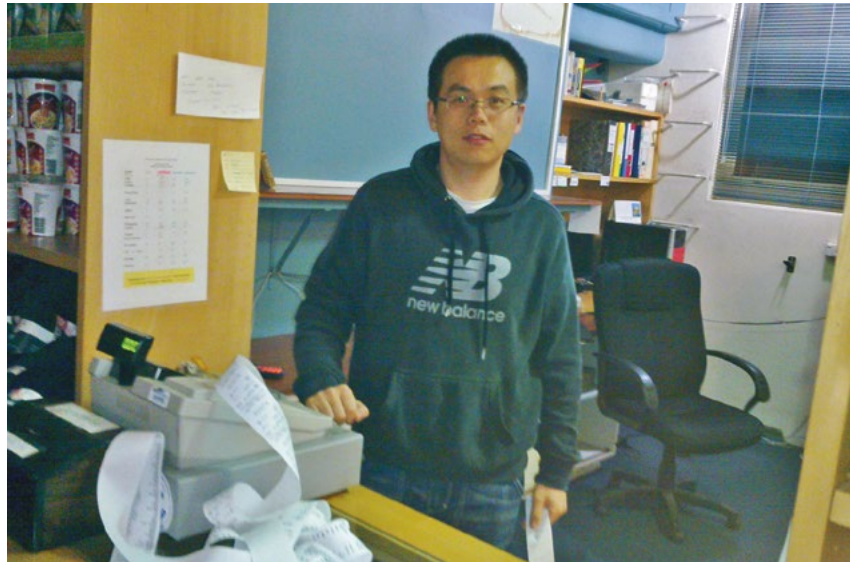
**HAO WANG** is a young man with a good grin and eyes that twinkle. He likes telling stories with a laugh at the end. His volunteer role as a host/administrator at the **WELLINGTON SEAFARERS CENTRE** suits him perfectly.

Hao came to New Zealand from the north-east of China, near the Russian border in 2009. He studied English language at Victoria University followed by IT studies at Whitireia in Porirua.

He decided to volunteer for two reasons. One was to get work experience; the other to improve his English and meet more people.

Through **VOLUNTEER PORIRUA** he found out about the **WELLINGTON SEAFARERS CENTRE**, described by manager of volunteers, Bob Peters, as 'a home away from home for those who earn their living on the sea'. This place, strategically situated on the waterfront, is a welfare centre for visiting seafarers. It includes internet, telephones, snooker, table tennis, a TV lounge, games and shopping. Pastoral care is also provided as required. The centre's hours are 10am to 4pm weekdays and 7pm to 10pm evenings.

Twice weekly Hao is there taking on the evening slots. The experience has, he says, fulfilled his two major reasons for volunteering ... and more. 'The seafarers are from all sorts of countries so I have to talk a lot of English and about all sorts of things. Like building, and snooker and being at sea for two to three months at a time.'



“Yes, I am learning a lot about people from all over the world.”

He enjoys operating the club, as he calls it, by himself, knowing that Bob is on the end of a cellphone if he needs to know something. 'I now can tell people all about cheap calling cards – it's only three cents per minute for almost anywhere in the world – and how to calculate exchange rates. And then lots of seafarers want to go somewhere in Wellington – like McDonalds for a burger.'

India, China, the Philippines, Korea are all countries of origin hosted by Hao in his role with the **SEAFARERS CENTRE**. He's surprised at how nice they all are, how much they want to gather somewhere that is welcoming ... and how many want to go to McDonalds for a burger. 'Yes, I am learning a lot about people from all over the world.' ■



# Volunteering a life changing starting point

**VICKI PERE** decided to try volunteering after she was made redundant. Her case manager at **CCS DISABILITY ACTION** suggested that she get in touch with **VOLUNTEER HUTT**. She jumped at the opportunity, seeing it as a way to get out of the house and meet new friends.

She started volunteering at the **RED CROSS SHOP** in Petone. At first she was tagging and steaming clothes, but as her confidence grew, she wanted to work more behind the till. Once she was trained on the register and with the EFTPOS machine she never looked back. 'Since working at the **RED CROSS**, it's lifted my confidence right up,' she says.

Katie Terris, manager at **VOLUNTEER HUTT**, recalls a referral she received from Vicki's case manager: 'You would be mad not to take on this person. She is the best person you will get.' It's exactly this sort of positive impression that Vicki leaves with everyone she meets. She attributes it to volunteering. 'Before the **RED CROSS**, I was often upset and I didn't know what to do with myself. It's just changed my life. It helped me believe in myself.'

With her new-found confidence, Vicki started a determined job search. 'It was hard but I kept trying,' she says. Eventually she found and responded to a job ad and successfully completed an interview with Ropata Village. Vicki services the apartments there part-time and loves it. She says it's volunteering that gave her the confidence to seek paid employment.



**"It's just changed my life. It helped me believe in myself."**

'Some people want to get out there and work but don't have the opportunity. Volunteering is a great opportunity if you do it – to realise your own ability.'

Vicki says her life is much better since taking that first step toward volunteering. She now has a partner, and is full of aspirations. Among other things, she wants to travel, and to help out with the **SPECIAL OLYMPICS**. 'It's just to get out there and prove to yourself that you can do it, to be positive, not negative.'

For Vicki, volunteering was the starting point for a life changing experience. ■



STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHS TIM GANLY

# Volunteering provides local knowledge

**JAIROSS LIM**, his wife May and their three sons arrived from the Philippines in August 2008. One of the reasons these skilled migrants chose New Zealand to be their new home was because of the country's 'culture of volunteerism'.

Jaiross quickly found volunteering activities with **UPPER HUTT CITY COUNCIL'S COMMUNITY SERVICES** supporting a number of their summer events. Meanwhile the search for full-time employment was proving to be challenging – and frustrating. As he said when interviewed by **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON** some months later: 'My skills and experience in accounting, administration and logistics were not landing me a job. I could feel that employers were looking for local experience and that they were not familiar with the way a work-to-residence visa operates.'

However the networks and contacts he had developed in the course of his volunteering were to stand him in good stead. One of these later became that much-needed 'local referee' which, in turn, led to his positive application as a Community Administration and Project officer with Community Services. He was selected in early 2009 for this interesting position which includes providing administration support and assistance in the co-ordination and implementation of safety projects.

Meanwhile, May and her sons spoke with Katie Terris of **VOLUNTEER HUTT** and discovered that Upper Hutt organisations had a number of interesting roles on offer. Paolo completed the 20 hours of training required to be a **CITIZEN'S ADVICE BUREAU** worker; he is now part of the



**"Volunteering provided me with the local experience ... and the opportunity to unexpectedly meet potential employers."**

Upper Hutt team while taking a break from University.

Marco took on art tutoring and mural painting during the summer holidays with **TIMBERLEA COMMUNITY HOUSE**. May worked for some months as a volunteer with the **UPPER HUTT RED CROSS SHOP**. 'We have built up local knowledge, networks and friends through volunteering,' says Jaiross Lim. 'We belong.'

Looking back on his 'settling in' experience, Jaiross says that getting the job was a combination of his skills and years of experience, as well as his volunteering 'which provided me with the local experience, not to mention the personal sense of accomplishment that you get out of it; and the opportunity to meet potential employers unexpectedly!' ■



# Another manager of volunteers champion in the making

**SARAH JANE PARTON** (pictured left) is co-manager (her colleague is **LINDA BEATSON**) of **ARO VALLEY COMMUNITY CENTRE**. The hours these two women work are minimal and to make the shared role effective, they communicate regularly but are usually on site separately.

To avoid feelings of isolation, which can be an issue with sole positions where activity comes and goes, Sarah made a decision early on in the job, to involve as many volunteers as possible.

‘We also quickly realized there was far more work to be done than we could possibly fit into our timeframes. Extending our capacity with a diverse volunteer team was the answer.’

In previous positions involving film and art projects, Sarah has managed large teams of volunteers. Nevertheless, she admits the designing of roles and delegation of tasks at the community centre, has been a ‘fast learning curve’.

We talked with new volunteer **SEKA JONES** (right). A graphic designer keen to combine ‘making a difference’ with work experience, she was attracted by the role description on **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON**’s database. In a nutshell, the position was about designing and painting banners and posters which would promote community activities. The one being worked on when this interview took place was a street proclamation calling all locals to come to a meeting to hear what the Lambton Ward candidates standing for Wellington City Council, had to say.

As Sarah said, ‘Keeping residents around here informed and knowledgeable about local issues is one of our main aims.’ A series of community gardens was another innovative



PHOTOGRAPHS SAM RYE

“Extending our capacity with a diverse volunteer team was the answer.”

project that resulted in volunteer roles combining art ideas and practical hard work. Some of the gardens are ‘secret’ and others visibly public. All are edible and about local involvement.

With the community centre’s proximity to the university and student accommodation, several international students with agricultural backgrounds (Papua New Guinea, the Solomon and Maldiv Islands are examples) have signed up to the protocols associated with the ‘secret’ gardens. Almost 50 volunteers take part in growing vegetables and fruit trees for harvesting and sharing. The art element, in the form of posters and other eye-catching signs, has been the communication hook. This has meant a clever combination of promotional and people power.

Other roles created and now managed by Sarah and Linda, are daily administrators, skilled tutors and IT



specialists. ‘We’re in a tricky transition phase here,’ said Sarah. ‘Our resources are so limited and our computers are desperately in need of upgrading.’ At the time of writing, an expert through **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON**, was doing a re-build, re-installing job. He was impressed with the energy and vitality of the community centre – and the versatile co-ordinators.

‘They’re politically aware, keen for local involvement and understand the potential of developing and managing volunteer teams. An efficiently networked computer system will help them on their way.’ ■

# Project-orientated role at the zoo

**DANIZA GALINOVIC** loves her role as a Human Resources (HR) volunteer; easy to see from her radiant smile when she greeted me as I arrived at **WELLINGTON ZOO**. A newcomer to New Zealand, Daniza had recently been presented with the Volunteer Connect Award – a certificate given to acknowledge contribution by newcomers to the community sector – at the 2012 **VOLUNTEER WELLINGTON** AGM and 20th birthday celebration.

From Chile, where she studied Psychology specialising in Human Resources, Daniza came to New Zealand for a one-year 'OE'. Together with her partner they decided they would like to settle in Wellington. After participating in Victoria University's skilled migrant programme she decided to gain work experience through volunteering ... and to learn more about expressing herself in English.

'Picking up Kiwi idioms is not the only challenge. Learning Kiwi culture and workplace environment is equally important,' she said. Daniza feels her project-orientated role at **WELLINGTON ZOO** enabled her to do just that. By working alongside the HR manager she gained an insight into how HR policies are applied in New Zealand. 'It's not so different here ... recruitment, induction and recognition systems are similar.' Her training has also included attending seminars at the Human Resources Institute of New Zealand (HRINZ) in Wellington, an experience which has enriched her volunteering by building her industry knowledge and helping her make connections in the wider professional HR community.

A key highlight of Daniza's project work has been to review the **ZOO's** employment agreements and design a



“ ... I love to watch the otters.”

matrix of the key terms and conditions of employment contained in the different agreements. As well as freeing up some of the HR manager's time, Daniza has gained knowledge of NZ employment legislation, learnt the meaning of key HR terms in New Zealand and, above all, had a rewarding experience.

While not working at the **ZOO** Daniza is working in a part-time HR role for a private corporation. By volunteering alongside her paid work Daniza aims to gain an insight into how HR systems are applied in the broader context of a community organisation's mission and values.

'**WELLINGTON ZOO** is a great place to work,' she said. 'It's good to see people really involved in their work. I love to watch the otters.' As we were standing talking, in front of the red pandas' enclosure, I took time to view the beautiful landscape and listen to the children's laughter as they played.



What a pleasurable environment in which to spend your working day!

Exposure to Wellington professional life and a local work reference as well as her skilled contribution have become part of Daniza's **ZOO** experience. She sees her varied HR positions in New Zealand – her new home – as an invaluable pathway towards achieving her aspiration of finding a full-time HR role in Wellington. ■

STORY AND PHOTOS JENNIFER MONK