

Youth volunteers bring enthusiasm energy encouragement

Volunteer Hutt in collaboration with the Ministry of Youth Development and Hutt City Council Community Development, has been running a youth programme to explore and create possibilities for youth involvement in volunteering in Hutt City. The **Volunteer Hutt Youth Programme** is already proving a great success with last month's Hutt Valley Disabled Resources Trust (HVDRT) TriAbility Triathlon the latest event to utilise the skills and abilities of the Hutt Valley's youth to benefit all involved.

This year's inaugural HVDRT TriAbility Triathlon was held in Wainuiomata's William Jones Park accommodating almost 100 participants and their families, friends, and supporters for a fun and challenging sporting event. Volunteers were an essential ingredient of this event with **Volunteer Hutt's Youth Programme** to the fore.

'The HVDRT TriAbility Triathlon is like no other that I know of, in that it encourages competitors to enter independently or alongside their training buddy/buddies to continue their mutual support of each other,' says Charlie Holland, Project Manager for HVDRT and Event Co-ordinator for the TriAbility event.

'The youth volunteers brought enthusiasm, energy, and encourage-



ment whilst being courteous to the diversity of athletes that took part.'

The **Youth Programme** matches young people aged 12-24 who would like to support the community with organisations that need volunteers. The programme provides an opportunity for the youth involved to gain experience, confidence, and a greater understanding of their local community.

Many young people want to help others, and offer their services to the community but there are relatively few openings for their involvement. **Volunteer Hutt** is encouraging organisations within the not-for-profit sector to listen to what youth perceive they have to offer, and are working alongside both parties to achieve positive outcomes through volunteering.

At the TriAbility Triathlon event,

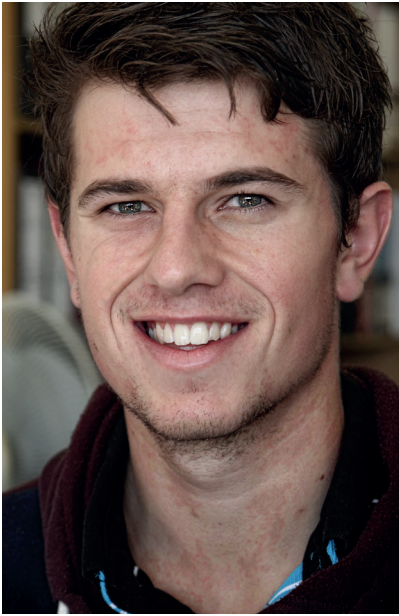
volunteers from Wainuiomata High School assisted in many areas including information and registration, and the swim, cycle and run courses. Several volunteers even started at 6am, an unusually early start on a Saturday morning for them.

The **Youth Programme** at **Volunteer Hutt** continues to grow, with more volunteers and more opportunities arising for them to be active in their community. Seventy people have registered with the programme since October. Many assisted with Christmas events including Birthright Children's Christmas party, Refugee Services Family Picnic, Jackson St Project and the Alicetown Community Family day.

After being advertised through their school communities, students from Wainuiomata High School and Chilton Saint James have come forward to be involved in the programme and many others have responded to **Volunteer Hutt's** weekly advertisement in the *Hutt News*.

Recently, Oosh Multimedia created a promotional video for the programme which will be shared with schools and youth groups to encourage and promote youth volunteering. The video is featured on the **Volunteer Hutt** Facebook page which you can follow for up-to-date information about opportunities to get involved.





Vinny Ritossa

“They wanted to reach out to younger volunteers and asked if I could do anything that would help inspire young volunteers to get out there.”

VINNY RITOSSA heard about the **Volunteer Hutt Youth Programme** through a family friend. This led to him supporting the programme by using his skills in video production to make a short promotional video targeting young people.

“They wanted to reach out to younger volunteers, and asked if I could do anything that would help inspire young volunteers to get out there,” says Vinny. “We wanted to create a video that would inspire young people to get out there and volunteer, or at least give them information on how to volunteer

if they wanted to. We thought the best way to do that would be through something comedic, so I wrote a sketch to encourage people to volunteer in a funny way.’

Being part of the production company Oosh Multimedia meant that Vinny had the skills and resources at hand to create an attention-grabbing and entertaining video that is ideal for sharing on social media, an ideal method for connecting with young people and spreading the word about the programme.

Reflecting on the variety of volunteering opportunities was one objective Vinny had for the video. “There’s heaps of different things you can do. We are hoping to make people understand that maybe you could volunteer to do something you are really interested in and would like to do as a career. If they can see that it could help them in the future and they would also be helping people, that’s a good way to get young people interested in it,” suggests Vinny.

As for Vinny and Oosh Multimedia, making the video was a worthwhile effort in itself. ‘We love making films and it’s always good to practice.’ The writing, shooting and editing of the video took around two days in total. The product of this is a valuable tool in promoting volunteering to young people, in a format which can be viewed and distributed online (YouTube and Facebook) in an effective way. Adds Vinny ‘Volunteering is a good cause. Without volunteers, organisations wouldn’t be able to run a lot of events. I think volunteers are an undervalued resource.’ ■

Susan Fellows

“It’s good being there for others, and you can make some new friends.”

After seeing an opportunity to participate in the **Volunteer Hutt Youth Programme** advertised in the Wainuiomata High School daily notices, **SUSAN FELLOWS** volunteered as part of the Youth Crew for the Hutt Valley Disabled Resources Trust Triability event.

A multi-sport event for all levels of ability, especially those with disabilities, Triability needed volunteers to help the event run smoothly. Susan, along with other volunteers from Wainuiomata High School helped direct competitors along race paths and between event locations. Equally important was cheering on and supporting the competitors, and helping to make the day a great success for them.

Arriving at 6:30am to help with the set-up and working throughout the day until the afternoon prize giving, Susan felt the event was a good experience for her. ‘It’s good being there for others, and you can make some new friends.’ She is already aware of the importance of being active in the community, saying ‘I’m used to volunteering – my Dad helps with Scouting, the Lions and Grey Power and I go along and help them with fundraising.’ She also believes more information in the careers centre of schools would be valuable and encourage more students interested in taking the next step to volunteer. ■



Nina Pilcher

“It was possibly the first time I had anything resembling a job, where I had a lot of responsibility. I’m not the most organised person, I kind of had to learn to be organised.”

For **NINA PILCHER**, learning about responsibility and organisation were just a few of the personal benefits gained from volunteering through the **Volunteer Hutt Youth Programme**. She assisted at the Jackson Street Programme Christmas Festivities and the experience was a valuable and enjoyable one.

‘It was possibly the first time I had anything resembling a job, where I had a lot of responsibility,’ says Nina. ‘The whole experience of having a boss of sorts, the idea of having

responsibility, was new.’ The party was a great opportunity for Nina to assist a community group with a short-term commitment and a beneficial way to spend her summer break from school. ‘I had all these holidays and there was nothing to do.’

Nina’s tasks included writing visitor’s names in the guestbook and giving them information about the event. The activities included a treasure hunt. ‘They went up and down Jackson Street. I gave chocolates to the shops to give out to the children when they solved the clues, and then the children would come back to me for more clues.’ Being relied upon to complete these duties was also a learning experience. ‘I’m not the most organised person, I kind of had to learn to be organised.’

Having fun while working, made for an even more positive experience. ‘It was really fun. They transformed the historic jail into a Santa’s grotto; it’s normally a museum. The children would come and get photos with Santa.’ Gaining skills that will be useful when looking for work in the future was another reason Nina took on a volunteer job.

‘It was great for the experience and I met a lot of really awesome people.’ To other young people who might be considering a similar volunteer role, Nina says ‘Do it. It’s a really good experience, a great way to get working experience.’

Her first involvement in volunteering is unlikely to be her last. ‘I’d definitely do it again. Helping people was big thing for me. The kids were really excited, I remember seeing them come in and feeling it was so cool I was helping with this thing and it meant so much to them.’ Knowing that you can make a difference is an invaluable lesson for young people, something Nina certainly took away from her role with the Jackson Street Programme. ‘Being part of the community was really awesome.’ ■

Jessica Barnes

“I’ve had the ongoing support I needed, plus the right amount of being hands-off, allowing me to learn and grow in the role myself.”

After two years out of the workforce, **JESSICA BARNES** decided that volunteer work would be a good stepping stone to get back into paid employment. ‘I saw the ad in the *Hutt News* and thought it might be interesting. I had done a little bit of writing in college but it had been awhile,’ says Jessica about taking up a role as a youth writer for the **Volunteer Hutt Youth Programme**.

After interviewing her first volunteer and working on her profile, Jessica was pleased to hear her writing was well received at **Volunteer Hutt**. ‘It’s been so long since I had really written anything. It was enjoyable to get back to that and I’ve felt a certain level of accomplishment in having done it.’

The first one was Nina and she felt she did a ‘good job’ on that. The process has allowed Jessica to improve her interviewing skills and as a result, her writing. ‘I found it quite difficult to start off with. I was surprised by how difficult it can be to get information from some of the younger people. Some of them were quite closed books in a way. I think I’ve found over time I’ve been able to draw more out of each person I’ve spoken to and I think that’s just learning interview skills, the right questions to ask, when to talk and

when to not talk rather than filling the silences myself.'

A highlight of her experience working with **Volunteer Hutt** has been the support provided by manager Katie Terris, and the programme co-ordinator Dianne McKellar. 'I've had the ongoing support I needed, plus the right amount of being hands-off, allowing me to learn and grow in the role myself. After the first few interviews, I started contacting and setting them up myself. I've been given the freedom within the role to set my own pace and take responsibility for the work I produce.'

Eventually, Jessica started as a regular interviewer in the office, and was able to learn more about how the organisation worked. 'I like being in the office and knowing how **Volunteer Hutt** works. It's slightly different to my youth writer experience, but a nice complement to it.' In addition to interviewing and profile writing, she has also been accompanying the **Youth Programme** Co-Ordinator to meetings with organisations that are potential sources for youth volunteer roles to learn about the programme.

'That's an experience I hadn't had before, being able to see the setting up of the relationships between organisations; it's been really interesting seeing what it takes to run the programme.' Developing skills to help in her search for paid work is one of the benefits the role has given Jessica, she says. 'I feel that volunteering, and being able to put that on your CV is a positive sign that you have taken the initiative to do something other than wait. It's such a difficult job market so I feel like taking a volunteer role is a step to help in putting myself out there.' ■

Anjali Tyagi

“It's very important for international students coming in to go for a volunteer job first.”

After arriving in New Zealand from India one year ago, **ANJALI TYAGI** is continuing her search for paid work and has taken up volunteer work in the meantime. 'It's a bit difficult to get a job here. I'm looking everywhere.'

With a desire to get some New Zealand work experience to put on her CV and after a recommendation from a friend, Anjali came to **Volunteer Hutt** for an interview and picked out a few roles she was interested in. She soon took up a role with The Foundation of Youth Development working as an office administrator working six hours a week on tasks such as data entry, calling students, excel spread sheeting and sorting information packs.

Although she is looking to eventually work in a different field, Anjali feels she has benefitted from her voluntary work. 'I'm more comfortable interacting with people and it has helped in getting the accents because my accent is completely different from kiwis.' She has also referred two friends to **Volunteer Hutt** to find volunteer work also and would recommend it to others looking to gain experience or occupy themselves during their search for paid employment. 'It's very important for international students coming in to go for a volunteer job first.' ■

Sam Taylor

“Due to his Asperger's, Sam has had trouble with social interaction which can make it difficult to fit into some working environments. 'I have learned a little more how to deal with others.’”

SAM TAYLOR came to **Volunteer Hutt** from Q-Nique, an organisation providing services to those with mental illness, addiction or health and disability needs. Sam had been diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome and had trouble finding paid employment. 'They recommended I start volunteering because people look at volunteers and see you've actually been doing something and that's awesome,' says Sam.

'I had been looking for data entry work but there wasn't anything available, then they said they had a role playing board games with the elderly.' Sam smiles broadly 'I heard 'board games!' and I heard 'scrabble!' I hadn't played in years but I thought playing board games for work would be awesome.'

Upon taking up the role, Sam found he wasn't going to get any easy opponents. He regularly faces a tough competitor named Beryl, who has been playing scrabble her whole life. 'I try to stay as close to her as possible, she's good. Honestly it's a heck of a challenge.'

Despite the enjoyable nature of the work, Sam knows it's valuable

assistance for the residents who really benefit from the mental stimulation. 'I like the idea of helping to keep their minds working as well.' The residents have plenty of knowledge to pass on to Sam also. 'I used to use up my U on other words but Beryl taught me to hold it until you get a Q. Don't waste it.' Listening is a big part of the role, says Sam. 'Beryl is quite amusing and quite tough. She is very interesting, sometimes we just sit there and talk about all kinds of things from ages past. I think 'wow, you know so many things'. The most awesome part of the job isn't the scrabble itself; it's the conversations with the people.'

Due to his Asperger's, Sam has had trouble with social interaction which can make it difficult to fit into some working environments. 'I have learned a little more how to deal with others,' says Sam and he recommends volunteering to others in a similar position. 'When I came in they had a huge list of volunteer roles. There are volunteer jobs that could actually get you skills for the jobs you need. Volunteering also allows you to meet new people, if they like you then you've made a contact that might know of other jobs, it's all about that networking.'

Sam is also taking the initiative to move toward paid employment. 'I'm considering orderly work at hospitals but I wasn't sure how to do it. One of the recommendations from the HR department at the District Health Board was to have the sort of skills people look for in an old folk's home, and where am I currently working? I can now go and ask the manager what kind of things they would look for when hiring someone for a job, then I can work on learning those skills so I can go for the orderly job.' When asked what advice he would give potential young volunteers, Sam replied 'Take it as an opportunity to network, and have fun.' ■

Emma Gough

“Definitely give it a go, because if you do one activity you're gonna find that you love it and you are gonna apply yourself to so many more things.”

The Hutt Valley High School Service Council encourages students to participate in community service. By linking up with **Volunteer Hutt** new opportunities have been made for young people to experience service through volunteering.

Service is a new area in the school added to the current Cultural and Sport programmes. After meeting with the **Volunteer Hutt Youth Programme** Co-Ordinator, the service council was keen to get involved with some of the events that Volunteer Hutt had planned.

Service Council leader **EMMA GOUGH** has been a dedicated volunteer for several years and has assisted in the organisation of the students volunteering. 'First of all we did the King of the Hill. I didn't actually go, but I organised the whole thing. We had 13 students go and help out as marshals on the day. My job was organizing them and making sure they were there, that they knew what they were doing,' says Emma of her role in co-ordinating the team for the local athletic event.

'We've also done the refugee house set up which was 10 students and we were working with **Volunteer Hutt** and the Red Cross. We went in and arranged the houses that the refugees would be staying in, so we put all the

furniture together and put away the kitchen necessities, made the beds. Things to make it a home.'

Emma took on the responsibility of being the go-to person to liaise between her fellow students and the **Youth Programme** Co-ordinator, Dianne McKellar. 'Everything kind of came through me so if there were any problems it would be me who dealt with that and I also organized the transport and made sure everyone was ok.'

Clearly enjoying volunteering and its personal benefits, Emma has several other volunteer efforts to her name. A volunteer coach at the Maungaraki Tennis Club, she has also been coaching and managing badminton at Hutt Valley High School for four years. Since taking on her leadership role in the Service Council, Emma has been working to get others engaged.

'I love the experience especially when I get to do the activities and not just organise them, but for me one of my biggest goals has been allowing other people to experience what kind of (positive) feelings come with volunteering. That has been my push to get more people involved.' In her final year of college this year, don't expect Emma to slow down her passion for service. 'I imagine I'll be doing a significant amount (post school). I want to go to Victoria University and I know they've got a programme where service counts for quite a lot of a certificate, so I'll definitely be keeping that up.'

Emma's hard work and commitment is no doubt an inspiration for other young people and her advice to those who haven't volunteered before is to 'Definitely give it a go, because if you do one activity you're gonna find that you love it and you are gonna apply yourself to so many more things. I think it's really important, a great experience and youth should definitely be a part of it.' ■

Caleb Flynn

“The most recent one I did was a marathon set-up. I enjoy them because you get to meet different types of people ... You gotta make sacrifices for some things.”

The concept of organised volunteering was new to **CALEB FLYNN** when he came to Volunteer Hutt along with his friend Tom who needed to fulfil the community service requirement for his Duke of Edinburgh Award. Tom's mother brought him along and asked Caleb to come too. Says Caleb, 'I just went along because they asked me if I wanted to come, and I thought it

sounded interesting and like something to do.'

At the **Volunteer Hutt** office, Caleb and his friend filled out their volunteer registration forms and talked with an interviewer about what type of events they might like to volunteer at. His first role was in Petone at the historic jail, helping to set up for the Jackson Street Programme Christmas functions. Further Christmas events followed and Caleb has continued to put his hand up for volunteer roles, with over seven different events now added to the list.

'I liked the second event a lot. There were lots of people there. Me and Tom were in charge of the sports things; we set up games and supervised. Most of them were children under 12 and they just wanted to run around. We also set up food and helped pack up after.' Attending Scots College when he started volunteering, Caleb is now at the Weltec Trades Academy and it is clear where his interests lie. 'I'm not bad at academics but I'm more of a practical person. I prefer doing physical work and more hands on stuff than sitting behind a desk.'

It's no wonder then that assisting to set up community events has been a great match for Caleb, and an experience that keeps him coming back to volunteer again. 'The most recent one I did was a marathon set-up. I enjoy them because you get to meet different types of people; it's interesting to see what kinds of people enjoy doing community service. I usually come early to set up and it's something to do on a Sunday or a Saturday.'

Caleb noticed many of the young people volunteering were doing so for Duke of Edinburgh commitments or school service requirements, but believes others would sign up if they knew more about what was involved. As he puts it, 'It's pretty cool, but you don't know that when people say you should sign up for it.' Furthermore, the occasional early start doesn't seem to bother him. After meeting for an interview at 9:30 on a Saturday morning, he humorously declared he's not usually a morning person but, 'You gotta make sacrifices for some things.' ■