

**BOUNCE-BACK OF
EPISODIC VOLUNTEERS:
WHAT MAKES EPISODIC VOLUNTEERS
RETURN?**

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**LEONIE BRYEN
DR KYM MADDEN**

Centre of Philanthropy and Nonprofit Studies
Queensland University of Technology
Brisbane, Australia

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GPO Box 2434
BRISBANE QLD 4001
Phone: 07 3864 1020
Fax: 07 3864 9131
Email: cpns@qut.edu.au
<http://cpns.bus.qut.edu.au>
CRICOS code: 002 13J

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Volunteering in Australian community service organisations is currently in transition and subject to paradoxical forces (Roe, 2000). One emerging trend is for volunteers who prefer short term volunteering assignments or specific projects, sometimes referred to as episodic volunteers (Hustinx and Lammertyn, 2003; Auld, 2004; Styers 2004). Whilst substantial literature exists on the retention of traditional life long volunteers (Gidron, 1984; Clary, Snyder and Ridge, 1992; Mesch, Tschirhart, Perry and Lee, 1998; Cuskelly and Brosnan, 2001), there is a gap in the literature about retention of episodic volunteers to 'bounce-back' or return to multiple assignments with the organisation. This gap has implications for volunteer managers who must determine whether their current programs and practices are suitable for the cross-section of their volunteers.

This exploratory Australian study uses qualitative method to examine the views and experiences of episodic volunteers in a local government community environmental group. Its aim is to investigate whether traditional retention methods and practices are applicable when bouncing-back episodic volunteers.

Findings suggest that episodic volunteers *do* differ from traditional volunteers and that many of the traditional retention strategies and practices do not feature prominently in bouncing-back episodic environmental volunteers. Further, episodic volunteers may be difficult to identify, even by group leaders who are knowledgeable about their volunteers. A complicating factor is that episodic volunteers appear to oscillate along a continuum between long term (traditional) and short term (episodic) volunteering, as their availability to volunteer to the group changes.

Findings show episodic volunteers can be predominantly motivated by altruism, in this case contributing to environmental preservation, with egotistic motivations such as enjoying the social interaction of the group, secondary. Having their needs satisfied in these areas, particularly perceiving an impact that their efforts had in their local environment, was vital to their bouncing back. Some differences were identified between episodic volunteers; for example, males with professional backgrounds were less interested than others in social benefits and often worked on an independent basis when it better suited their schedules. Results point to a range of differences from traditional volunteers, including less need for training, the opportunity to learn new skills and extrinsic rewards, as well as a need for organisational flexibility in allowing episodic volunteers to move in and out of the organisation easily.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Research Rationale

In recent years the concept of volunteering for community service welfare organisations has undergone dramatic change resulting in a shift in the way organisations are utilising volunteers. According to Jill Roe (in Warburton and Oppenheimer, 2000: v), 'there is little doubt that the whole voluntary sector in Australia is currently in transition and subject to contradictory forces.' Although volunteers have generally been the lifeblood of nonprofits, contributing many hours in administration, service delivery and fundraising, this is slowly changing as volunteers and volunteering itself alter in response to multiple factors such as people's fast paced hectic lives, the move towards professionalism in the nonprofit workforce and the introduction of quality standards.

One of the trends in volunteering that is gaining popularity is the notion of episodic volunteering (Independent Sector, 1999, 2001; ABS 2000; Points of Light Foundation, 2004; The Prime Minister's Community Business Partnership, 2005; Wilson, Spoehr and McLean, 2005). This style of volunteering means that volunteers prefer to have short term volunteering assignments or discrete task-specific volunteering projects rather than the traditional long term volunteering opportunities (Hustinx and Lammertyn, 2003; Auld, 2004; Styers, 2004). If Australia follows the US, then volunteer-involving organisations in this country could be faced with more volunteers giving less time.

Naturally this has implications for nonprofit organisations: volunteer managers must determine whether their current programs and practices are suitable for both the traditional as well as the modern episodic volunteer. Whilst a plethora of literature exists for volunteer managers on how they can retain their traditional volunteers, little is known about the episodic volunteer and what needs to be done in order to successfully 'bounce-back' or return a volunteer for further volunteering tasks. Thus this exploratory research probes episodic volunteer experiences in one volunteer setting. The organisation is not a nonprofit organisation in its own right but a local government community organisation (a community organisation auspiced within a city council).

1.2 The Purpose Of This Research

The research was designed as an exploratory study to investigate whether the critical success factors for sustaining traditional volunteers are applicable and appropriate for bouncing-back episodic volunteers. To achieve this, the following research questions were developed:

1. What are the critical success factors for bouncing back episodic volunteers?
2. How do these factors compare to the retention factors of traditional volunteers?

The purpose of addressing these research questions is to generate hypotheses relating to the phenomenon of bounce-back volunteering, not to test them, as is appropriate for a relatively under-researched topic. Data from the study will inform the conceptual development of relevant hypotheses that can be quantitatively investigated.

1.3 Organisation of the Paper

Chapter 2 reviews existing literature across a number of domains beginning with the significance of volunteers. It then reviews selected US, UK and Australian literature on retention of traditional volunteers. Finally, it turns to what is known about episodic volunteering.

Chapter 3 describes the research purpose in more detail, the operationalisation of the methodologies and issues in data collection.

Chapter 4 presents the findings of the research in light of traditional volunteer retention theory. It analyses episodic volunteer views and experiences, discussing the applicability of four influencing factors on retention as suggested by volunteer studies to date.

Chapter 5 considers the outcomes of the research in light of the posed research questions. It concludes by providing a summary of outcomes and discussing the implications for further research.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter begins by discussing the vital contribution volunteers make to nonprofit organisations and government departments. It then reviews the issue of volunteer retention across a selection of US, UK and Australian studies over two decades, suggesting that volunteer retention is the result of four key factors: motivational, organisational, demographic and psychological. It highlights a gap in the literature: volunteer retention studies have been limited to traditional volunteers with few if any empirical studies of episodic volunteers. It considers the episodic volunteering literature and notes a volunteering trend in this direction. The chapter concludes that whilst episodic volunteering increasingly raises its head in the literature, little empirical research informs our understanding of the phenomenon.

2.1 Significance of Volunteers

For many decades, nonprofit organisations have utilised the services and assistance of volunteers to carry out their activities and serve their cause (Knight, 2002: 1). By being an integral part of many nonprofit organisations, volunteers provide much needed support and services in all areas of their activities. Perrino highlights that not only do ‘volunteers complete essential work and help organisations carry out their missions’, but they are a ‘potentially invaluable resource’ (Perrino, 1998: 1). Volunteers perform a large variety of tasks in nonprofits including administration, service delivery, client and staff support.

Volunteering Australia defines formal volunteering as ‘an activity which takes place through not for profit organisations or projects’ and is to ‘benefit the community’ and is undertaken ‘without coercion’ (Volunteering Australia, 2005). Considering this definition and the active role that volunteers play in nonprofits, it would be easy to assume that volunteers are limited to the third sector. However, this is not the case. Although volunteers make a vital contribution to third sector organisations and are involved in the arts, health and welfare, sport and recreation and community services, they are also an integral part of many government departments contributing vital hours to emergency services, transport, environmental protection and even education (Conroy, 2002: 5). Although volunteers in government technically fall outside the Australian definition of ‘formal volunteers’ (due to the fact that they are not volunteering in a nonprofit organisation), they have been studied by numerous international researchers who have inherently classified them as volunteers (Brudney and Kellough, 2000; Templeman, 2001; Conroy, 2002; Curtis and Byron, 2002; Rehnberg, 2005).

Given the crucial contribution that volunteers make across multiple domains the ability of an organisation to retain its volunteer force becomes paramount, especially as recruiting and training of replacement volunteers is such a costly exercise (Cuskelly and Brosnan, 2001: 104).

2.2 Retention of Volunteers

During the past two decades there has been a plethora of research exploring how and why volunteers remain with organisations. Careful analysis of these studies, which have been conducted in a variety of organisational settings including health, welfare, and aged care, reveals motivational factors, organisational factors, demographic factors and psychological factors, each of which can have a significant impact on whether or not an individual continues volunteering with an organisation. The dearth of empirical research about episodic volunteers makes it difficult to assess their applicability to this phenomenon.

2.2.1 Motivational Factors

Early studies into volunteer retention examined the correlations between a person's motives, or reasons, for volunteering and the subsequent period of time spent volunteering. Gidron believes that 'individuals remain in organisations when their expectations, which are derived from their motivations, are met' (Gidron, 1985 in Mesch, Tschirhart, Perry and Lee 1998: 5). This indicates that a volunteer will remain with an organisation for a longer period when their reason and motive for volunteering are met.

Motivations for volunteering are diverse but can be classified into two types: altruistic and egotistic reasons. *Altruistic* reasons for volunteering are intrinsic and include a desire to help others, self sacrifice, compassion for others less fortunate or contributing to social justice (Rubin and Thorelli, 1984:228). *Egotistic* motives relate to the self-interest of the volunteer and include wanting to learn new skills in preparation for employment, the opportunity to socialise and meet others and to use leisure time constructively (Mesch et al 1998: 6). Indeed, Warburton and Mutch (2000: 32-43) suggest a growing trend towards obtaining skills through volunteering that can be used in the workplace. Commonly, volunteers have a mix of altruistic and egotistic reasons (Rubin and Thorelli, 1984; Mesch et al, 1998, Lucas and Williams, 2000; Melville, 2002; Soupourmas and Ironmonger, 2002).

Research into the relationship between motives and retention has yielded some surprising and somewhat contradictory results. In some cases, egotistic motives are

positively associated with retention, whereas other studies have revealed that a volunteer's self interest is negatively associated with retention.

One early example of this was Rubin and Thorelli's (1984: 227) study of egotistic motives (such as doing things with a child) and longevity of service by volunteers in a US Big Brother/Big Sister program, concluding that 'longevity of participation is inversely related to the extent to which the service volunteer's entry was motivated by the need or expectation of egotistic benefits'. On the other hand, Lammers (1991) and Mesch et al (1998) showed that the egotistic motives of wanting to learn new skills that could be used in paid work had a positive association with retention. Their two studies of volunteers, one in a crisis telephone service and the other in AmeriCorp, showed career-related motives to be one reason why volunteers continue their service. What is consistent across studies is that once the volunteer has acquired the necessary skills, they often left to pursue other avenues of employment. This is supported by Gillespie and King (1985 in Lammers 1991: 140) who point out that the 'turnover rate among volunteers may rise as they take the skills they learn in voluntary organisations to organisations in the for-profit sector.'

Generally, volunteers need to feel as if they have contributed to a valued end (altruistic motivation) but having altruistic motives does not guarantee longevity of participation (Smith in Rubin and Thorelli, 1984: 233).

In sum, while distinctions between egotistic and altruistic motivations in retaining volunteers can be drawn, organisational factors or 'site-specific' factors may exert a greater influence (Rubin and Thorelli, 1984; Melville, 2002). For example, this was the finding for Lucas and Williams' NSW study (2000) of the link between volunteer motives and retention using a modified version of the Volunteer Functions Inventory (developed by Clary, Snyder and Ridge in 1992). Results were inconclusive about intrinsic or extrinsic motivational factors as measured by the VFI but underscored the importance of 'site-specific' factors for volunteer dissatisfaction. What is apparent from these studies, too, is that they tell us about the traditional volunteer, not necessarily the episodic one.

2.2.2 Organisational Factors

Studies during the last two decades have indicated that volunteer retention is related to organisational factors such as:

- the utilisation of volunteer skills (Francis, 1983; Saxon and Sayer, 1984);
- volunteer preparation and training for the work to be undertaken (Gidron, 1984);
- the appreciation and support the volunteer receives from the organisation (Cnaan and Goldberg-Glen, 1990; Stevens, 1991; Perrino, 1998); and
- supervisor feedback (Paull, 2000).

Other studies demonstrate varying degrees of influence on retention for organisational factors such as:

- a supervisor's personal qualities (duBoulay, 1996);
- volunteer education and training to prevent burnout (Kessler, 1991; Metzger, Dollard, Rodgers and Cordingley, 1997); and
- the use of incentives including performance based rewards (Watts and Edwards, 1983; Pearce, 1993; Holman, 1999; Cuskelly and Brosnan, 2001).

Although the literature is diverse and encompasses many dimensions, it highlights that organisational strategies play a vital role in retaining volunteers. What is consistent through this research is the concept of the volunteer as one who either remains as a volunteer or who leaves. Few, if any, studies seek to reconceptualise how a volunteer engages with an organisation (as is the case with the episodic volunteer).

2.2.3 Demographic Factors

The retention literature also suggests that demographic factors such as:

- age;
- race;
- gender;
- level of education;
- distance from the volunteering site;
- household income; and
- previous volunteering history

can affect a volunteer's tenure. In particular, links have been demonstrated between demographic factors (especially age, level of education and the amount of time spent

in the community where the volunteering took place) and a volunteer's commitment and service duration (Rohs, 1986; Lammers, 1991; Stevens, 1991; Brandt, 1998).

Nevertheless, some studies show organisational and motivational factors to be more important than demographic ones. This is evident in Stevens (1991: 38) who suggests that the critical influence on the retention of volunteers was the 'recognition and appreciation the volunteer received from the organisation'. This is consistent with Lammers (1991: 139) who found that the 'overall duration of volunteering seemed to depend upon continued education and positive features of the volunteer experience: satisfying aspects of the task itself as well as relations with other volunteers'.

2.2.4 Psychological Factors

Other studies about volunteer retention have indicated that:

- an individual's attitude to their volunteering;
- the amount of satisfaction or dissatisfaction experienced by the volunteer; and
- the volunteer's expectations (their psychological contract) being met or not

can play a role in determining their commitment and ultimately their retention by the organisation (Francis, 1983; Saxon and Sawyer, 1984; Farmer and Fedor, 1999; Paull, 2000). Pearce (1993: 90-91) believes that 'there is a strong intuitive argument in favour of the selective retention of volunteers with positive attitudes' and also that 'dissatisfied volunteers can easily leave the organisation the moment they become unhappy'. Therefore it makes sense to 'strive for *satisfied* volunteers in order to prevent early termination of the volunteer assignment' (Francis, 1983: 20). The organisation can play a vital role in determining whether or not the individual is satisfied in their work (Saxon and Sawyer, 1984: 44). This includes perceived organisational support in the form of being valued, appreciated or recognised and feeling as if the organisation generally cared about the volunteer's efforts. Indeed, the level of such support can have a stronger impact on withdrawal intentions than whether or not the psychological contract has been met (Farmer and Fedor, 1999: 359).

Once again, although these findings are inherently interesting to volunteer researchers and practitioners, it is imperative to point out that the association of psychological factors with retention has predominantly been studied on traditional volunteers, with episodic volunteers being overlooked. Overall, the retention literature encompasses many facets on why individuals continue volunteering in an organisation, or not. The gap of interest in this study is how to retain episodic volunteers.

2.3 Episodic Volunteers

Episodic volunteering is defined for the purposes of this study as volunteers who prefer to have short term volunteering assignments rather than traditional long term volunteering opportunities (drawing from Hustinx and Lammertyn, 2003; Auld, 2004; Styers, 2004). An example of episodic volunteering is where an individual volunteers for a defined sporting event like the Commonwealth Games or for the running of the sweets staff at an annual school fete: both have clearer time boundaries than traditional volunteering, such as working weekends for an indefinite period at an animal shelter. The phenomenon is worth studying because it is attracting growing interest amongst nonprofit organisations, especially Managers of Volunteers (Macduff, 2005). This section considers the occurrence of episodic volunteering and the research in this area to date.

2.3.1 An old or new phenomenon?

Although episodic volunteering is claimed to be a growing trend in westernised countries, strictly speaking there is nothing new about it. For centuries people have been involved in short term community assignments, from building a church or a shed for a local farmer, or as parents who volunteer for Scout camps or sports days (Macduff, 2005). By occurring outside the scope of a nonprofit organisation, however, such activities have fallen outside the definition of formal volunteering and, indeed, the construct did not appear in the volunteering literature until some 15 years ago. The phenomenon has become more prevalent in recent times, possibly because of people's increasingly hectic lives and the professionalism of the nonprofit workforce. It has also been 'discovered' by academics as an under-explored area that is ripe for research.

Whilst these earlier examples appear episodic in nature and certainly fit within the current understanding of episodic volunteering, they are synonymous with Hustinx and Lammertyn's (2003) *collective* style of volunteering. This 'collective' style of volunteering, which had its foundations in 'service ethic and a sense of obligation to the community' (Hustinx and Lammertyn, 2003: 168), has been overshadowed to some degree by our current day preference for 'reflexive' volunteering. 'Reflexive' volunteering reflects a volunteer's 'personal interests and needs' and occurs 'on a more sporadic, temporary, and non-committal basis' (Hustinx and Lammertyn, 2003: 168). It is not clear whether both styles are exclusively episodic but both embrace it.

This suggests that there is room for a blending of Macduff's and Hustinx and Lammertyn's theories of modern volunteerism. Hustinx and Lammertyn (2003: 171)

state 'we do not assume that "new" volunteer forms are replacing "old" ones, but that "collective" and "reflexive" ingredients are blended together in a personal volunteer cocktail.' Their theories are 'multidimensional, multiform and multilevel in nature' (Hustinx and Lammertyns, 2003: 169). Macduff's (2005) categories of episodic volunteering allow for old and new types of activities based on time and duration of service. She identifies three main types of episodic volunteering:

1. *temporary* volunteering – the giving of a short period of time (a day or a few hours);
2. *interim* volunteering - the giving of time on a regular basis for less than six months. For example, the interim volunteer might give time to a three month long project (Macduff, 2005: 50)
3. *occasional* volunteering – the giving of time 'at regular intervals for short periods of time' . For example, the occasional volunteer might work annually at a certain event (Macduff, 2005: 51).

Table 1 illustrates how episodic volunteering might be categorised by Macduff (2005) and Hustinx and Lammertyn (2003). The broad scope of activities that are covered by these categories show that the phenomenon is not limited to the new.

In many ways, episodic volunteering may be perceived as both an old and a new phenomenon: old because the style of volunteering has been evident for centuries and new because there's been a profound change in the way we think about this type of volunteering and its growing appeal for people. By no means is episodic volunteering replacing traditional volunteering, but it is becoming more prevalent as individuals make volunteering choices based upon their personal lives (Macduff, 2005: 55). In some cases, it is a reflection of the post-modern era and often 'contemporary individuals are oscillating between collective and reflexive biographical sources of determination' (Hustinx and Lammertyn, 2003: 170).

Table 1: Ways of categorising volunteering activities
(drawing upon Macduff, 2005; Hustinx and Lammertyn, 2003)

Temporary, interim or occasional episodic volunteering	Collective vs. Reflexive volunteering (Community vs personal needs)	Example
<i>Occasional</i> episodic	Collective	Selling flowers for the annual Daffodil Day with church friends
<i>Temporary</i> episodic	Collective	Joining work colleagues to raise funds through a golf tournament (one-off)
<i>Interim</i> episodic	Collective	Working for two months with a group of kindy parents to rebuild an outdoor play environment
<i>Occasional</i> episodic	Reflexive	Volunteer umpire for an annual soccer carnival
<i>Temporary</i> episodic	Reflexive	Guest speaker at youth shelter
<i>Interim</i> episodic	Reflexive	Student volunteer at aged care centre during summer semester (one-off)

2.3.2 What we currently know

Episodic volunteering first appeared in the literature some fifteen years ago when Nancy Macduff (1991) suggested that there was a change in the way people were volunteering, preferring short term volunteer opportunities rather than traditional long term volunteering opportunities. There has been some controversy over definitions. For example, Harrison (1995: 375) suggests that ‘most volunteer participation is discrete or episodic, rather than continuous or successive’, while Danson (2003: 37) suggests that episodic volunteers ‘go from organisation to organisation getting involved in one-off events, then move to other events at other organisations’. Nevertheless, the notion of episodic volunteering as *distinct* from traditional volunteering is gaining ground in the literature and in some ways is seen as characterising the new breed of volunteer today. According to Auld (2004: 10), ‘modern volunteers seem more likely to prefer a short one-off involvement, possibly on a regular or repeat basis’. This growing preference for short term or episodic volunteering is supported by Styers (2004: 85) who argues that ‘episodic volunteering has become the biggest change in volunteering’ in recent times.

What is interesting to note is that whilst Styers sees a change to volunteering generally towards short-term projects, Danson (2003: 36-37) distinguishes between episodic volunteers and short-term volunteers. He believes that short-term volunteers have more of an interest in the organisation, want a ‘well-defined job of limited duration’

and in many cases 'can be considered specialists'. In contrast, he portrays episodic volunteers in a similar manner to Macduff's (2005) *temporary* category.

There is definite interest in episodic volunteering amongst scholars. Consider a recent edition of *The Australian Journal on Volunteering* (Volume 9, Number 2, 2004), which offered 12 articles: seven refereed articles and five viewpoints. Five touched on aspects of episodic volunteering, whether it was a mention of the 'time flexibility' wanted by older volunteers (Warburton and Cordingley, 2004: 68) or the 'changing demographics and trend towards short-term project based commitment among young people, baby boomers and people of working age' (Volunteering Australia, 2004: 91).

Episodic volunteering also has appeared as a Topic of the Month in papers produced by Merrill Associates. Merrill's September 2001 paper, "Rethinking Episodic Volunteering" acknowledges the growth in episodic volunteering and predicts that it is 'undoubtedly here to stay' (Merrill: 2001: 3). It quotes from an online discussion between Robin Popik of City Volunteer Services in Plano, Texas, and Christine Nardecchia of Volunteer Service in Dublin, Ohio. According to Popik, '75% of the people coming through my door are episodic volunteers rather than the 25% that it used to be. The database of short term vs. long term seems upside down' (Popik in Merrill, 2001: 1). Nardecchia confirms this change, suggesting that the majority of volunteers she sees are episodic and that she has shifted her focus away from maintaining volunteers throughout the year, to retaining them 'for the same event from year to year' (Nardecchia in Merrill, 2001:1).

Despite its interest for practitioners and scholars, the literature offers relatively few empirical studies of the phenomenon. When Harrison (1995: 381) examined the motivation and attendance decisions of volunteers working in a homeless shelter, he found that 'much volunteer work is discrete or episodic in nature, rather than regular or routine'. The male volunteers in the study, who were scheduled to work roughly one night a month during the winter at the homeless shelter, could be deemed *interim* volunteers under Macduff's (2005) styles of short term volunteering. He concluded from this study that the 'specific motivation to take part in a volunteer setting flows from answers to four intrapersonal questions' (Harrison, 1995: 381):

- (a) How much would I like or get out of attending volunteer work?
- (b) How strongly do I think that important other people expect me to attend volunteer work?
- (c) How likely is it that I can attend volunteer work? and
- (d) How clear is it that attending volunteer work is the right thing for me to do?

Harrison's research fits within the framework of the motivational structure of the 'reflexive' volunteer proposed by Hustinx and Lammertyn (2003:174), which emphasises the individualistic, self-orientated and sometimes contradictory nature of reflexive volunteer motivations. It is also consistent with Dietz's (1999) study of the motivation of episodic volunteers using the VFI (Volunteer Function Inventory). Whilst the study was predominantly quantitative in nature and limited to employee volunteers from the Make a Difference program in Phoenix, it makes a vital contribution in terms of understanding the motivations of episodic volunteers.

Dietz found that the *frequency* of volunteering affects how people classified their involvement, and that 'interim and long term volunteers are significantly more motivated by the value motive than temporary volunteers' (Dietz, 1999: 79). This could be due to the fact that the former 'have been volunteering frequently enough to notice the impact on the population they are serving resulting in a value driven motive' (Dietz, 1999: 75). Although the value motive was predominant in Dietz's study, three new factors (other than Clary, Ridge and Snyder's 1991 six functions) emerged as important:

- religious affiliation;
- fun; and
- employee team building and morale.

As this was an employee volunteer population and Make A Difference plans projects for company involvement, Deitz (1991: 74) says it is logical for the latter to be a factor. Once again the seemingly contradictory motives of episodic volunteers are apparent (Hustinx and Lammertyn, 2003: 174).

Another recent study examined the behavioural characteristics of students participating as volunteers in sporting events (Auld, 2004). Whilst this study did not specifically set out to examine episodic volunteers, the nature of sport event volunteering makes a vital contribution to understanding the *occasional* episodic volunteer. According to Macduff (2005: 51) the occasional volunteer 'provides service at regular intervals for short periods of time' and can be counted on to 'return year after year'. The occasional volunteers service 'might be a month or two in duration or just the evening of the event' (2005: p. 51). Auld's study revealed that 'despite a high likelihood of volunteering' there were a number of managerial issues that needed to be considered when planning and administering sporting events that relied on youth volunteers (Auld, 2004: 17).

The previous studies undoubtedly give a valuable insight into episodic volunteer motivations as well as implications for the management of event

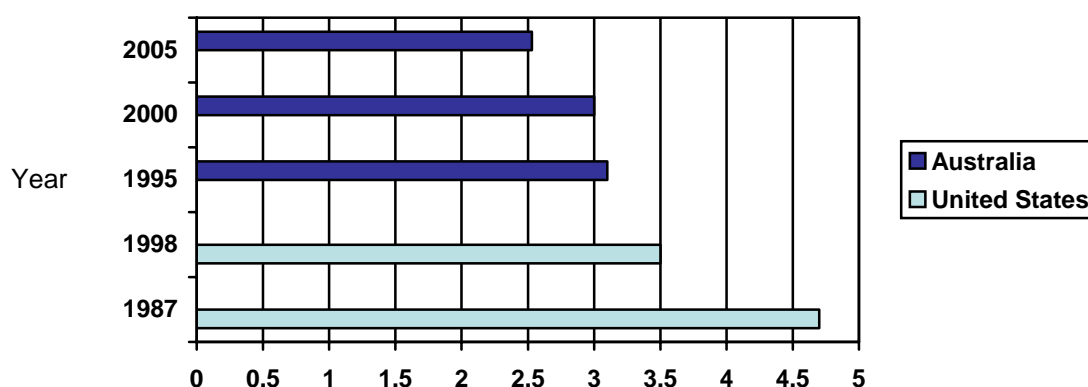
volunteers. However, they alone are not sufficient to substantiate the myriad of claims that episodic volunteering is on the rise. So where has the plethora of interest stemmed from and where is the evidence to support these assertions? The answer lies in the careful examination of volunteering data.

Data collected in the US shows that the number of individuals volunteering has increased by 10% between 1987 and 1998. ‘However, over the same time period, the actual average number of hours per week per volunteer has fallen from 4.7 hours in 1987 to 3.5 hours in 1998’ (IS, 1999, 2001; Points of Light Foundation, 2004). The Points of Light Foundation (2004) suggests that this is predominantly attributable to the rise in short term or episodic volunteering. In Australia, the same pattern is emerging.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, in 1995 24% of the population volunteered (or almost 3.2 million people) contributing 517 million hours, which equates to an average of 162 hours per year or 3.1 hours a week (ABS, 2001). Five years later, in 2000, 32% of the population (or 4.4 million Australians) reportedly volunteered 704 million hours to volunteering, or an average of 160 hours per year or 3 hours a week (ABS, 2001).

Recently, the Giving Australia Report (The Prime Minister’s Community Business Partnership, 2005) found that in the year to January 2005, 41% of Australians gave a total of 836 million hours or 132 hours/year equating to 2.53 hours per week. These figures suggest a trend to increasing numbers of volunteers working fewer hours (see Table 2).

Table 2: Volunteers Hours Per Week: United States & Australia



Note: Figures draw upon IS, 1999, 2001; ABS, 2001; Points of Light Foundation, 2004; PMCBP, 2005.

In contrast, however, The Victorian Giving Time Report (Soupourmas and Ironmonger, 2002) found the volunteer participation rate in Victoria in 2000 to be 32.8% (almost 1.2 million people), giving a total of 197 million hours or 3.2 hours per week, slightly higher than the same time given by volunteers across Australia in 1995. Indeed, a study by Wilson, Spoehr and McLean (2005: 40) found that 'both the number of volunteers in not-for-profits and the hours volunteers work in South Australia has risen between 2001 and 2003.' They point to an apparent increase in volunteering for committees and co-ordination of activities as well as in general volunteering.

Thus while the US figures clearly suggest more volunteers who are giving less time, the Australian statistics results are generally supportive with some contradictory findings. Additional Australian volunteering statistics are required to confirm the trend in episodic volunteering in Australia. Also, there is a clear need to understand the phenomenon of episodic volunteering, such as what encourages an episodic volunteer to return for further projects or events.

3.0 RESEARCH PLAN AND IMPLEMENTATION

3.1 The Research Questions

This study aimed to provide insight into episodic volunteers' views and experiences, and what is needed in order to successfully 'bounce-back' a volunteer for further volunteering tasks. The term 'bounce-back' is used to describe the situation where an episodic volunteer re-engages with the organisation. In particular, this study asks whether the critical success factors for sustaining *traditional* volunteers are applicable for bouncing-back episodic volunteers. The research, then, seeks to differentiate retention issues of traditional volunteers with episodic volunteers.

Two research questions underpin this study:

1. What are the critical success factors for bouncing back episodic volunteers?
2. How do these factors compare to the retention factors of traditional volunteers?

The remainder of this chapter focuses on the methodology appropriate for this research and discusses how the approach was operationalised.

3.2 The Research Design

A qualitative method was employed in this study because it sought to provide an insight into episodic volunteering rather than measure it (Patton, 2002). Both in-depth interviews and a focus group were used.

The study took place in a metropolitan-based community organisation auspiced by local government designed to encourage community members to become part of a local bushcare group and preserve native bushland areas. Each local bushcare group within the larger umbrella organisation consisted of volunteers and their own volunteer group leader. At the program's inception in 1990 four bushcare groups were established with a total of approximately 50 volunteers. It now has grown to over 120 groups scattered across a large Australian city and engaging over 2000 volunteers. The local government has employed four Officers who provide support for the groups in each district (north, south, east and west). This is achieved by providing tools and equipment, training, support and generally sustaining the groups. Each group has their own volunteer group leader (or co-ordinator) who liaises with their district Officer, and engages in a variety of environmental activities such as local weed clearing, planting trees, mulching, and creating habitats for wildlife. The organisation used for this study was selected for its access to the

researcher, its relatively large size and scope of activities, and the diversity of its volunteer base.

3.3 Sampling Procedure

A purposive sampling method was used in this study by which two types of participants were sought for inclusion: episodic volunteers and group leaders. The sample consisted of ten participants from three districts. Five episodic volunteers from three environmental groups were independently interviewed (two females, three males) and five group leaders from three districts (two females, three males) participated in a focus group.

The process by which the sample was obtained was as follows.

- Meetings were conducted with previous and current district Officers to gain initial insight into group identification, episodic volunteer existence and determine prior suitability for research. These discussions with Officers took place by phone and in person over a two-month period. Once suitability was established, the project was submitted to the University for ethical clearance.
- The researcher then briefed district Officers and management about the project, gaining their co-operation and ideas to improve the recruitment process (with amendments subject to subsequent ethical clearance).
- All bushcare group leaders were emailed an invitation to participate in a focus group by their district Officer, and sought their co-operation in passing on information about the project to episodic volunteers in their groups. Whilst this method did not acquire enough participants for the research to continue, it helped to legitimise the study for potential participants.
- District Officers were contacted by phone for identification of groups with episodic volunteers: three groups were identified and their leaders contacted. Although group leaders were generally unaware of the term, they could identify 'episodic volunteers' once the term was explained. Early low response to the invitations to participate was explained by their lack of familiarity with the term: they thought they had no episodic volunteers in their bushcare group.
- Following a presentation outlining the project at the Citywide Meeting 2005 and invitations otherwise extended, sufficient group leaders with episodic volunteers were identified for inclusion in the study and their consent was obtained. Some group leaders were unavailable due to the difficulty of finding a suitable time for the focus group.

- Potential episodic volunteer participants identified by the group leaders were contacted by phone, then by email, to qualify them, inform them of the study and gain their co-operation for interviews. The final selection of group leader and episodic volunteer participants was made following an analysis of willing participants to ensure sufficient variety.

3.4 Data collection

Data was collected over a two-month period using both in-depth interviews and a focus group with episodic volunteers and group leaders, respectively.

Semi-structured in-depth interviews of 20-30 minutes in length were conducted with five episodic volunteers and were audiotaped for accuracy (see Appendix 1). A semi-structured approach allowed for flexibility in both how participants chose to answer questions and how the researcher followed these up, yet ensured all major questions were covered. The latter was important during analysis as it allowed examination of the four key factors for traditional volunteer retention (Marshall and Rossman, 1999). On completion of the interview, reflective sheets were completed by the investigator, tapes checked for accuracy and clarity and later transcribed.

A focus group with five group leaders was conducted in a central metropolitan location with two researchers (one facilitator and one observer). Its aim was to further explore the research question (see Appendix 1) and provide triangulation of data. An audio tape was made of the one hour ten minute discussion, and a summary made. On completion of the focus group, there was a period of sharing, reflection and elaboration between the researchers in order to ensure the data was useful, reliable and valid (Patton, 2002) and later the summary and the tape were compared for accuracy.

3.5 Implementation Issues

The main issue in implementing this study was the securing of participants within the allocated timeframe. Time constraints in the data collection phase of the research meant that not all episodic volunteers identified were able to participate due to limited availability. This is not surprising considering that episodic volunteers by nature may have limited availability. Also, some group leaders who expressed interest in the project were unable to attend the focus group (for reasons such as overseas travel, reluctance to travel to another district and work commitments).

3.6 Analysis of Data

The findings and data analysis are primarily descriptive with an explanatory component. The data analysis, which draws its base from the literature review and previous research in the area, consisted of categorising and analysing the results in a number of ways. The motivations of episodic volunteers were examined; particularly what motivated them to bounce-back to the organisation. Consideration of altruistic and egotistic motivations encompassed the following dimensions:

- Environmental preservation;
- Community reasons - building social capital;
- Tangible reasons - learning new skills, receiving training;
- Social reasons - belonging to a group.

These factors were analysed according to whether they were satisfied through volunteering for the local government community organisation and to what degree they impacted a volunteer's decision to bounce-back.

Secondly, the data was analysed in terms of organisational factors within the local government community organisation and their impact on bouncing-back an episodic volunteer in the following dimensions:

- Induction and training;
- Recognition and appreciation;
- Group leader's qualities such as being supportive, organised, and/or encouraging, and their use of feedback.

Thirdly, the data was analysed in terms of demographic variables (gender, occupation) and psychological factors such as satisfaction and met expectations (psychological contract perspective) and whether or not these affected an episodic volunteer's decision to bounce-back. Finally, comparative analysis and cross tabulation of data from the focus group is conceptualised in order to ensure validity of data and identify subtleties (Huberman and Miles, 2002).

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Prior to data collection, participants were emailed a consent and project information sheet (see Appendix 2) outlining the voluntary nature of participation, anonymity, confidentiality and use of findings. The researcher obtained informed consent from the participants fully covering the elements of competence, information,

understanding of that information and voluntariness before the research was conducted. The project was approved by the University's Ethics Committee.

3.8 Limitations of Research

A number of limitations exist because of the exploratory nature of the research. Firstly, although the small sample size may have limited the scope of the findings, quality in-depth interviews were conducted with participants. Secondly, allocated timeframe for conducting the research, securing participants and collecting data meant that there were potential and suitable participants that were unable to participate due to various reasons (such as being on extended travel, or having prior work commitments). This is not surprising given that episodic volunteers by nature may be difficult to collect data from given their time patterns and availability. Although the time constraints were a major issue in this particular project, it highlights methodological considerations for future research. Finally, due to the nature of qualitative research, the findings are not generalisable but rather give us insight into episodic volunteering. The purpose of addressing the research questions was to generate, not test, hypotheses relating to bounce-back of episodic volunteers, and is appropriate for a relatively under-researched topic. Data from the project will be used to inform conceptual development of relevant hypotheses which can be quantitatively investigated.

4.0 FINDINGS

This chapter discusses the results of this study. Firstly, it identifies the difficulties of identifying episodic volunteers in environmental groups and classifying these episodic volunteers using Macduff's (2005) framework. Secondly, it examines episodic volunteers' views and experiences of bouncing-back. Finally, it discusses the four factors that are important to traditional volunteer retention and whether they apply to the bounce-back of episodic volunteers in local government community environmental groups. Quotations from episodic volunteers and group leader are provided to illustrate findings (note: at the end of quotes, EV or GL is used to denote the type of participant making the comment).

4.1 Episodic Volunteers

Findings highlight a number of interesting facets about episodic volunteers, including difficulties in identifying episodic volunteers and classifying using Macduff's (2005) framework. Findings, to some degree, challenge Macduff's (2005) episodic volunteer classifications, at least in this particular organisation. They show that episodic volunteers may oscillate along a continuum between long and short term volunteering in a manner more closely aligned with Hustinx and Lammertyn's (2003) collective-reflexive volunteering styles. For example:

At the moment I can only go...not very often at all at the moment given my family circumstances. I used to go quite regularly... and I will go again, when I don't have other things happening in our family (EV3).

I really attend as often as I can...but because of other commitments I'm not always available. Sometimes I'm there on a regular basis, every month for 2-3 months, then I might miss a couple because of other commitments (EV5).

Findings also indicate that episodic volunteers are difficult to identify. In some cases the group leaders were not able to distinguish between episodic volunteers and long-term ones who demonstrate episodic attendance at the group working bees. In other cases, episodic volunteers saw themselves as merely juggling time and volunteer commitments. For example:

One goes from time to time when one can to join the [bushcare] group. I tend to work on my own and have taken it upon myself to keep the area

maintained along the creek in front of my house...so I've taken over that site and I'm basically doing a stretch of 80 meters or so of creek (EV4).

What happens is the [bushcare] group has working bees at fairly regular intervals...and it just so happens that the majority of those are on exactly the same day as...[another volunteering activity]. So when those clash, the club takes precedence because I've been doing that for 20 odd years. When they don't clash, I go along [to bushcare]! So, in fact I'm a regular volunteer, but when it does not clash with other pre-commitments (EV2).

Indeed, even if volunteers are episodic, they may not want to be. Findings support the notion that short term volunteers do not see themselves in these terms but instead that they give the time they have. As one participant on discussing this issue empathically stated:

I'd agree with that! I think it's quite right really. I don't think there's any difference really (EV5).

In sum, findings show difficulties with identifying and classifying episodic volunteers using Macduff's framework, suggesting instead that episodic volunteers may be located along a continuum that consists of long term volunteering at one end and short term at the other. There is also evidence that flexibility within the organisation overall, and within the specific volunteering unit (a particular bushcare group) enables volunteers to oscillate along this continuum depending upon their current life situation.

4.2 Bounce-back of Episodic Volunteers

This section compares findings to the traditional volunteer retention literature. It explores whether the four variable factors of retention apply also to episodic volunteer bounce-back.

4.2.1 Motivational Factors

Findings show episodic volunteers in this environmental community group to be primarily motivated by environmental preservation, which was a clear driving factor in their decision to return. For example:

It's the love of the planet really, putting something back when we've taken so much out of the environment (EV4).

I enjoy things with nature, particularly trees. It's the environment that attracts me... and the contribution...you can really see the growth (EV1).

I go there in order to perhaps return the area to its native extent as far as possible by removing the rubbish, getting rid of weeds and encouraging revegetation (EV5).

Volunteers were also motivated by community reasons including the building of social capital and the ability to give something back.

I 'spose it's the fact that I've lived in the area for 23 years and have been involved in different committees... and also it keeps my finger on the pulse of what's happening in the area so I can contribute (EV3).

Life's been really good to us and I do think we should put something back into it (EV2).

I believe it's a great opportunity for the community... and it's a pity that the community is largely unaware of it (EV5).

They also gave their time because they enjoyed the social side of volunteering in their local bushcare group. For example:

It really is a lot of fun. We had a group at one stage who decided we'd form a mulch truckers union. We were just having a whole lot of fun and the camaraderie is sufficient really (EV2).

I would think it's the group of people too...they're really interesting people and come from all different backgrounds and professions (EV1).

However, these benefits seemed to be by-products of their volunteering rather than the main reason for it. Other egotistic motivations appeared to be

relatively insignificant variables in this research. For example, two episodic volunteers commented on the proximity of the site to their home; this reflects a desire to volunteer in their local area, supporting research such as Melville (2002) and PMCBP (2005). Moreover, there were few other reasons suggested.

Overall, findings offer support for predominantly altruistic and multi-dimensional motivations, in this case environmental preservation and building of social capital (Hustinx and Lammertyn, 2003). Egotistic motivations – specifically, having fun and socialising – were apparent but were less important.

4.2.2 Organisational Factors

Volunteer retention literature suggests that many facets within the organisation – such as training - have a bearing on whether or not individuals continue volunteering (Gidron, 1984; Kessler, 1991). However, findings in this study suggest that training had been limited for the episodic volunteers. Only two episodic volunteers had attended the induction training day and although one said '*it didn't have any real bearing at all (EV5)*' on coming back, the other felt it was a worthwhile day and helped them to realise just how special the area was:

I think it's really important to have the contact [with the organisation] because they transfer the vision they have for the area. It really helps you realise how special the area is...and have the care it deserves (EV3).

Rewards, recognition and appreciation also are claimed to have an impact on retaining traditional volunteers (Watts and Edwards, 1983; Stevens, 1991; Pearce, 1993; Holman, 1999; Cuskelly and Brosnan, 2001) and that they can occur by both formal and informal means (Paull, 2000; Creyton and Morgan, 2005). However, the episodic volunteers in the project felt that they received enough reward from the nature of the work and these rewards were instrumental to them coming back.

The reward to me is looking back over time and seeing that you've managed to make a difference (EV5).

I think the satisfaction you get out of it, just by doing it and looking at a job well done is sufficient reward for the volunteering (EV2).

I personally don't need any reward. I've never really thought about that for others. You're just doing it for the love of what you're doing I guess (EV4).

Nevertheless, they did report feeling appreciated for their efforts from group leaders, as well as the other volunteers in the bushcare groups.

It seems to me that the feeling of being made welcome and you know 'thank goodness you're here', anytime you can do this, it's appreciated...it's all you want (EV2).

I think I'm genuinely appreciated no matter how small the effort. Certainly the times that I've been and had to leave early I certainly didn't feel as if I'd let the group down. It comes from other members of the group too...not just... [my group leader] (EV1).

I do feel very welcome, even though I cannot commit all the time. When you go, you try to give your 100% and do whatever you can...to make up for the times you couldn't go...(EV3).

Both episodic volunteers and group leaders said that making people feel welcome was vital in ensuring that episodic volunteers bounced-back.

I know the way our group does welcome other people and that's absolutely vital...to getting those people to return rather than just a nod. In other words, make a bit of a fuss over them because it encourages them to come back and they feel a part of it (EV3).

When we have those big days [that lots of episodic volunteers come] we encourage them and make them feel appreciated by greeting, linking and introducing (GL1).

Group leaders, in particular, felt that making people feel valued was important in bouncing back their episodic volunteers.

It's important to make them [volunteers] feel welcome, appreciated and feel valued. I've occasionally been to other groups (as a volunteer) and found it difficult to identify what I was supposed to be doing. I couldn't get clear instructions (GL3).

It's important to make them feel welcome and valued...to at the end say 'that was great, hope you had a nice time, we look forward to seeing you next time'...but I also like to say to people - be very clear, 'come once a year, once

a month or six months. We're just happy to see you for an hour or three, whatever you want is fine, there's no obligation' (GL1).

[It works] because then people are confident that no matter how busy they are, whatever contribution they give is magnificent...(GL4).

Findings suggest that although the episodic volunteers in this research worked for altruistic rewards (for example, feeling like they were making a difference to their environment), being appreciated by their group leader and other members of the group made it easy for them to come back at a later time.

The literature also shows that traditional volunteers prefer supervisors who have five qualities, including the ability to relate to people and show respect for them, which in turn impact on retention (duBoulay 1996). Loudon (2004) reports similar findings when dealing with episodic volunteers in short term projects. However, the results of this study show that group leaders who have episodic volunteers vary significantly in their management style and approach to working with them.

I don't actually do anything for, with, or about my volunteers, we're there to do bushcare (GL4).

I'm effusive at each bushcare meeting - much of what I do is give energy to people, making sure they know what they're doing, making sure they're having fun and feeling good about themselves...I come home and I am so drained (GL1).

I don't like myself being involved, as sort of coordinating and saying what do people want to do, but to have a bit of a plan gives them some direction (GL3).

Despite differing management styles, they were all caring and appreciative about their volunteers, providing refreshments and a social chat after working bees. Episodic volunteers enjoyed this social time after the working bee:

I like the way there's always a morning tea at the end...there's a physical break and everyone's encouraged to sit 'round and chat as a group (EV1).

When we finish a bit, there's a cup of tea or whatever...then we move off to the next bit (EV2).

It was not the deciding factor in their decision to return, however. The two primary reasons stated for bouncing-back were, firstly, that they were personally asked (IS, 1999, 2001; ABS, 2000) and, secondly, that they perceived making a tangible difference to a physical area.

Always when I get a personal email [from the group leader] saying that 'I really need some extra hand this weekend'. That always works! ALWAYS! (EV1).

...the concept is sufficient enough...to say that something was being done with what is basically waste land...and it's worth doing and just saying 'we had a part in that and that's good' (EV2).

The thing to me is to preserve that area of the country so people can walk through there and...if they keep their eyes open, they can see wildlife and the native vegetation (EV5).

Thus the principal organisational factor that appears to contribute to episodic bounce-back is the personal ask (showing support for IS, 1999, 2001; ABS, 2000) but a combination of many organisational factors may contribute (Melville 2002). For example, the local government community organisation ensures a supply of equipment; there is enthusiasm from group leaders and fellow volunteers; guidance is offered from the district Officers; and a flexible arrangement allows for the easy ebb and flow of volunteers. As two participants commented:

...certainly all the necessary equipment...the gloves, diggers and all the physical tools we need (EV1).

Their contribution and interest...was a vital part of the professional image...giving us advice and things like that...very vital part of a successful group (EV3).

4.2.3 Demographic Factors

The episodic volunteers (three males, two females) in the project fell in the 45-65 year bracket or the babyboom generation. They were from varying backgrounds (including professional, businessperson and homemaker) and life stages (working full time, part-time, retired and self-employed). They also varied widely in their knowledge of flora and fauna species.

I'm not a horticulturalist...grasses, shrubs, trees and that's about as far as I go. But if it's a question of wheel barrowing mulch around, turning the hoses, clearing the weeds...I can deal with that (EV2).

When we moved in, the creek was just a whole lot of alien stuff...huge asparagus ferns to lantana, to cassia regrowing. The group got stuck in there...poisoned the Chinese Elm, took out lantana and replaced it with native vegetation (EV4).

Findings suggest that male episodic volunteers (from professional backgrounds, currently working full time) had a preference for working alone and focusing on environmental tasks.

It's often difficult for me to join the group...because of the nature of my job. It's basically getting down and getting on with it when I've got the time, energy and enthusiasm. The convenience of near my house means that I can pop down for 15 minutes or a couple of hours (EV4).

I go there to return the bush to its native extent as far as possible by removing the rubbish, getting rid of weeds and encouraging revegetation...other people may be there for social aspects...like working with a group of like-minded people (EV5).

This approach is synonymous with Hustinx and Lammertyn's (2003) reflexive style of volunteering where volunteers are often self organised and may want to develop their own project in consultation with the supervisor. Two group leaders told of similar experiences with episodic volunteers.

It's beneficial if they have an interest in a particular area of bushcare, like creek bank work - I had one chap, a lawyer who got really busy [with his job] and couldn't come to meetings...I gave him some tools and plants every now and then. He just worked in one particular area and in that little area, he could work without lots of other support...in the moments he had time (GL4).

One specific situation... [male] is going to leave his job. He said he'd love to take a couple of months and just work in the park [bushcare site] for 2 months, everyday on his own...(GL1).

This preference of males from professional backgrounds for a reflexive style of volunteering aligns well with the current organisational structure within the bushcare groups wherein volunteers can work independently and within their time constraints. In this study, female episodic volunteers preferred to work with a group, showing few signs of pursuing their own projects, and they enjoyed the social (or collective) side of volunteering.

I think what we've got down there is really great and I don't think you'd get much better...[laughs]. Thanks to the regulars who look after it and organise it. I just go with the flow and I think it's very good (EV3).

There's always a number of choices. You can be independent or you can be part of a team approach to the plantings. There are some people who like to do the whole thing themselves and are probably much happier working by themselves. But when you work with someone, you learn a little bit about the person too... it's not intrusive, but there's a nice little exchange of life experiences as well (EV1).

In contrast to the traditional volunteer retention literature that suggests demographic variables are often outweighed by organisational factors, this research indicates that different personal styles of volunteering (reflexive or collective) are significant and may need to be catered for by the organisation.

4.2.4 Psychological Factors

The literature suggests that fulfilment of the psychological contract (Farmer and Fedor, 1999) and the amount of satisfaction experienced by volunteers (Francis, 1983; Saxon and Sayer, 1984) impact on traditional volunteer retention. In this study, episodic volunteers reported substantial satisfaction from seeing environmental areas develop and change for the better over time, and that this kept them coming back. As noted previously, they were predominantly motivated by environmental preservation and this motivation was satisfied through their bushcare group.

I have a great love of birds ...and all Aussie wildlife and it's a chance to give back a little of what we've basically screwed up. We've even had the Powerful Owl, which is pretty rare these days...the Rufus Whistler has moved back in, the little Strider is nesting in the bank and the Scrub Wrens which I've never seen there before... and the only Aussie Native Hen that I've ever seen has

been down at the creek,...with a chick...amazing! This stuff didn't used to be there... it happened to move back because of the habitat (EV4).

They've [bushcare group] done sooo much work. The main entrance is cleared and there are now seats where people can go and picnic...and it's really been made into a lovely open area. Lots of the original plantings are around two metres high ... and they shade really well (EV1).

Episodic volunteers who reported community-building as a motivation also had this satisfied through their local bushcare group, and this was a contributing factor to their bounce-back.

...accomplished a great deal...not just in the parkland but also getting people of the area together...which keeps the community ...and holding people in the community together to work with the environment (EV3).

Overall, episodic volunteers were there for environmental and/or community reasons, which were satisfied and contributed to bounce-back. While episodic volunteers felt appreciated and valued (and also had sufficient equipment and other types of organisational support) – all of which contributed positively to their experience - the amount of *satisfaction* they received in protecting the environment appeared to have the greatest impact on bounce-back. This differed from the notion that organisational support in the form of being valued and appreciated has a larger impact on withdrawal intentions of traditional volunteers than whether they have their needs and/or expectations met (Farmer and Fedor, 1999: 359).

5.0 CONCLUSION

This exploratory study investigated the phenomenon of episodic volunteering, a form of volunteering that is attracting growing interest in the community sector. Considering the vital contribution that volunteers make to nonprofit and government organisations, the ability of an organisation to retain all of its volunteer force becomes paramount. Whilst much literature exists on retention of traditional volunteers, little is known about what makes an episodic volunteer return or 'bounce-back' for further assignments. Statistics indicate the growing popularity of episodic volunteering, therefore the research addresses a timely and relevant issue for volunteer involving organisations. The research sought to identify the critical success factors for 'bouncing-back' episodic volunteers, and to compare these to the retention factors of traditional volunteers. A qualitative method was used in order to gain the deepest possible insight into why episodic volunteers keep coming back.

5.1 Outcomes of the Research

Findings indicate that episodic volunteers do differ from traditional volunteers and that many of the traditional retention strategies and practices do not feature prominently in bouncing-back episodic environmental volunteers. Further, episodic volunteers may be difficult to identify and even group leaders who are knowledgeable about their volunteers are challenged in distinguishing them.

This may be due to some volunteers working independently outside the group working bee times as well as to the reluctance of some volunteers to be categorised this way (Merrill 2001). At least in this particular organisation, episodic volunteers cannot easily be classified using Macduff's framework as they appeared to shift or oscillate along a continuum between long term (traditional) and short term (episodic) volunteering. This is similar to that of volunteers who may oscillate between collective-reflexive styles of volunteering (Hustinx and Lammertyns, 2003).

This study shows episodic volunteers to be predominantly altruistically motivated by environmental preservation. Secondary motivations for their volunteering were the desire to build community, to give back to their community and to engage in social interactions. All of these motivations were satisfied through their volunteering experience, directly impacting upon their decision to re-engage over time. In contrast to traditional volunteers (Farmer and Fedor, 1999), the high degree of satisfaction appeared to have a greater impact on bounce-back than the organisational factors of recognition and appreciation.

Generally, the amount of training an episodic volunteer received had an insignificant impact on bounce-back, a finding that differs from traditional volunteering retention literature. This may be due to the fact that the environmental episodic volunteers are altruistically motivated, giving their time for environmental preservation. Although the episodic volunteers possessed a range of knowledge and skill levels, they were all able to contribute to environmental preservation. Thus they differed from traditional volunteers who may be volunteering in order to gain new skills, thereby making the amount of training an influencing factor on retention (Lammers, 1991; Mesch et al, 1998; Warburton and Mutch, 2000).

While the episodic volunteers in this study generally felt appreciated by the group leader and members of the group, regardless of the amount of time they volunteered, it did not seem to have as large an impact on bounce-back as the rewards of contributing to environmental preservation. This finding points to a possible difference to the retention of traditional volunteers where appreciation is vital (Stevens, 1991; Perrino, 1998). A further difference may exist with rewards, with traditional volunteers needing to be rewarded in formal and informal ways (Paull, 2000; Creyton and Morgan, 2005). Episodic volunteers in this study were informally rewarded by the nature of the work, gaining much satisfaction from looking back and seeing for themselves that they had made a difference to the local environment.

A noteworthy finding of the research is that some episodic volunteers (particularly males with professional backgrounds) showed a preference and a tendency for working alone. They were significantly motivated by environmental preservation and were not overly concerned with the social aspects of being in a group and sharing morning tea. They preferred to get in and get the job done, and may develop their own projects in consultation with the group leader. These findings demonstrate a reflexive volunteering style (Hustinx and Lammertyn, 2003). Other episodic volunteers (in this case, females) differed. They enjoyed the collective side of volunteering whilst simultaneously contributing to environmental preservation. Thus variations were identified between episodic volunteers.

5.2 Implications for Further Research

The results of the project indicate that more empirical research is needed to understand episodic volunteering. Indeed, several aspects warrant attention, based on the findings of this exploratory study.

Firstly, this research highlights methodological issues and considerations when conducting research involving episodic volunteers. Given that episodic

volunteers were difficult to identify, further investigation into types of episodic volunteers would be valuable in building upon Macduff's (2005) and Hustinx and Lammertyn's (2003) categories of episodic volunteering. Table 1 could be a starting point for this research because it pulls together key constructs. Also, given their limited availability, further studies should ensure that adequate time is allowed in the data collection phase to allow for participation by episodic volunteers.

It would be beneficial if subsequent research could explore different types of episodic volunteering to ascertain the robustness of the proposed categories and whether they are comprehensive in addressing the phenomenon. In turn, research that informed the management of these styles of episodic volunteering would be extremely valuable.

For example, research into *occasional* volunteers (such as the volunteers who come on an annual basis for National Tree Day, or Arbour Day) would be beneficial in providing greater insight into environmental episodic volunteers. Similarly, a study of *interim* volunteers (including the volunteers who work on a short term environmental projects) would be useful in clarifying further the factors that contribute to bounce-back.

Secondly, it would be interesting to conduct a similar study in other local environmental organisations such as catchment groups in order to compare and contrast the findings. This could shed light on episodic volunteering in a broader environmental context. Do other groups allow for ease of movement by volunteers constrained by limited availability? How similar are their episodic volunteers' motivations and satisfactions?

A third area ripe for research is the preferences of volunteers based on their gender and occupation. Do working males with professional backgrounds prefer the 'reflexive' volunteering style? To what degree do they prefer to work alone? What types of volunteering activities are they involved in? Do the organisations in which they volunteer provide the flexibility for the volunteer to pursue their own projects when time permits? Conversely, do females typically prefer the 'collective' volunteering style?

Finally, a fourth opportunity for fruitful research is to explore the group dynamics permitting episodic volunteering. Results of this study indicate that flexibility within a group allows for volunteers to contribute when time permits. A positive, friendly and appreciative atmosphere, as well as having adequate resources and organisational support, helps episodic volunteers feel wanted regardless of how often they are able to join in group activities. What are the dynamics of other groups with episodic volunteers and why do their volunteers bounce-back?

These suggestions for further empirical studies highlight the fact that understanding the episodic volunteer has only just begun and much more work is needed. If Australia follows the US trend of decreasing hours given by volunteers, then it is vital that community organisations relying upon volunteers truly understand episodic volunteers and create programs and opportunities that allow for effective blending of both traditional and episodic volunteers.

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APPENDIX 1- Interview & Focus Group Questions

In-Depth Interview Framework for Episodic Volunteers

The interview will seek to explore with each participant:

1. The type of activities that he/she does.
2. How often he/she volunteers and under what circumstances.
3. Whether he/she has a preference for time specific or task specific volunteering opportunities.
4. What organisational factors contribute to his/her willingness to bounce-back.

Questions:

The current situation

1. Which site do you work on?
2. What types of activities do you generally do?
3. Tell me your experience and what your group has been accomplished so far?

The episodic experience

4. How often do you volunteer and under what circumstances?
5. Do you have a preference for specific tasks or specific time in terms of volunteering?
6. What motivates you to return to the environmental site?
7. Have you been involved in the induction or training? Did this encourage you to bounce-back?
8. In what ways should episodic volunteers be rewarded and recognised? Do you think it should be different to traditional volunteers? Is this your experience?
9. What did the organisation do (if anything) to encourage you to bounce-back? What could they do?
10. Thinking back over your experience, can you recall a situation that made a positive impact on your decision to bounce-back?
11. What was it/ how did the situation come about?
12. What happened?
13. What were you feeling at the time? (appreciated, excited, welcome etc...)
14. What would be your ideal volunteering experience and how would this fit around your current lifestyle?
15. Imagine that you were the group leader for your site and could provide any type of volunteering experience for episodic volunteers. What types of experiences would you provide? How would these cater for individual differences?

Focus Group Framework for Group Leaders

The focus group will seek to explore with the group leaders:

1. Group leader awareness of episodic volunteers and how they differ from traditional volunteers.
2. What is being done on a group level to encourage these volunteers to bounce-back.
3. What the organisation is doing to encourage bounce-back.

Questions include:

1. What does the term episodic volunteer mean to you?
2. Do you have these types of volunteers in your bushcare group?
3. When did you first become aware of the existence of episodic volunteers? What was the situation? Do you recall what you were thinking and feeling at the time?
4. Are you aware of volunteers who have been episodic and changed to long term? ..or vice versa? What do you think caused the change? How did the change affect the dynamics of your group?
5. What do you think the organisation is doing to encourage episodic volunteers to return?
6. I want you to think about the sort of training and support that you as a group leader receive. Do group leaders receive training about retaining traditional volunteers?
 - Are you successful in implementing these methods?
 - Which of these methods encourage episodic volunteers to return?
7. In what ways are volunteer efforts recognised and appreciated?
 - What is being done on a macro and micro level?
 - Is it different for episodic volunteers?
8. Do you have any suggestions on what could be done to encourage episodic volunteers to return for other projects?
9. Thinking back on your experiences as a group leader, can you recall a situation where you feel that you had a positive impact on retaining a volunteer.
 - What was the situation/ circumstances/ challenge?
 - How did you overcome this?
 - How were you feeling at the time?
 - What do you think you said or did that made the volunteer return?
 - Do you think your approach would be different for an episodic volunteer?
10. I want you to think about the dynamics of your group and imagine that you have episodic volunteers (eg: working on a particular project) and traditional volunteers (a different activity). Would the episodic volunteers effort be appreciated by other group members? What would need to happen within your group to ensure that the episodic volunteer returned? Would the situation change if the volunteers were working together on the same project?

APPENDIX 2

PROJECT INFORMATION SHEET

Bounce-back of Episodic Volunteers in Community Environmental Groups

This study is designed to explore the critical success factors in bouncing-back episodic volunteers in community environmental groups. Whilst the notion of episodic volunteering is gaining ground in terms of popularity, there is little empirical evidence available as to how episodic volunteers differ from traditional volunteers. Although Macduff (2005) puts forward a framework for classifying and categorising the different styles of episodic volunteering suggesting that volunteers may fall into the *temporary, interim or occasional* style, it remains apparent that there is a critical need for research to be conducted on episodic volunteering. Consequently, the term 'bounce-back' does not appear in the literature, and has been suggested by the researcher as a way to illustrate the re-engagement or return of an episodic volunteer. The researcher suggests that just as 'retention' applies to traditional volunteers, 'bounce-back' is coined for episodic volunteers.

Therefore the study will explore:

1. What are the critical success factors for bouncing-back episodic volunteers?
2. How do these factors compare to retention factors of traditional volunteers?

The overall project consists of:

- Interviews with episodic volunteers
- Focus group with group leaders

The project's final report due in November 2005 will be available to the organisation and the participants.

We guarantee that no linkage is made between responses and your name at any time. We will only keep your contact details for informing you of this and any future research.

If you have any queries about this project at any time, please feel free to contact:

Leonie Bryen
Masters Student
Centre of Philanthropy and Nonprofit Studies
Ph: 07 XXXXXXX
Email: bubble@mydesk.net.au

Dr Kym Madden
Supervisor/ Senior Research Fellow
Centre of Philanthropy and Nonprofit Studies
Ph: 07 3864 8051
Email: k.madden@qut.edu.au

Professor Myles McGregor-Lowndes
Director
CPNS
Ph: 07 3864 1020
Email m.mcgregor@qut.edu.au

In addition, you can contact the Secretary of the University Human Research Ethics Committee (07 3864 2902) if you have concerns about the ethical conduct of the project.