

**NEW PARTNERSHIPS:  
PROMOTING DEVELOPMENT IN OUTBACK TOWNS THROUGH  
VOLUNTARY PROGRAMS FOR GREY NOMADS**

A project of



*Funded by the Australian Research Council*

**Report of Barcaldine Field Visit – September 2006**

**By:**

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## **Grey Nomad Volunteering Project Barcaldine Field Visit**

### **Background to Research:**

The purpose of the study *New partnerships: Promoting development in outback towns through voluntary programs for Grey Nomads* is to explore the possibility of developing mutually beneficial relationships between Grey Nomads and isolated rural communities through voluntary programs. This research aims to identify both what the Grey Nomads may be interested in contributing, and what each town would be interested in hosting. Such programs would enable the sharing of information and skills between locals and visitors and enable the development of local facilities and services. Engagement in such programs may also potentially enhance the Grey Nomad experience contributing to a healthy productive ageing lifestyle.

This research uses the definition of 'grey nomads' as including those over 50 years of age who undertake extensive travel within Australia, usually for at least three months with their own vehicles, usually a caravan or motorhome.

The research is being conducted by Professor Jenny Onyx, Centre for Community Organisations and Management, University of Technology Sydney with Associate Professor Rosemary Leonard, University of Western Sydney and Volunteering Australia, the national peak body for volunteering. Funding for the research has been provided by the Australian Research Council

The research has two key components: a survey of grey nomads about their interests in volunteering, and field visits to between 6 – 10 towns outback towns across Australia to explore what kind of volunteer program/s could be developed in each town.

### **INTRODUCTION:**

Barcaldine is the first town to participate in the field work aspect of the project.. During the period of field work, 4<sup>th</sup> – 7<sup>th</sup> September 2006, the researchers: Professor Jenny Onyx, Associate Professor Rosemary Leonard and Kylee Bates, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Volunteering Australia conducted interviews with 14 people and facilitated a town meeting of interested parties on the evening of Tuesday, 5<sup>th</sup> September. A list of interviewees and participants at the town meeting is provided at Appendix A.

The purpose of the one-to-one interviews and facilitated meeting was to develop a basic profile of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) for that town, and to negotiate with the host organization of the town, what kind of volunteer program could be developed.

The interview schedule used to guide the one-one-one discussions is provided at Appendix B

This summary report contains the initial findings of the research team and presents a SWOT analysis for the town with respect to the potential to develop a voluntary program for grey nomads. In addition, the report provides some initial suggestions as to the process that could be used for determining the priority of proposed projects, what supports Volunteering Australia could offer to support the development and management of the project that is developed, and suggested next steps.

The report is presented to the Grey Nomads Project Action Group that was formed at the town meeting for their consideration of how to progress this project to the next stage and formally develop and pilot a voluntary program for grey nomads.

A list of initial nominations to the action group is provided at Appendix C. The inaugural meeting of the action group is scheduled for 5.30 pm on Thursday, 7<sup>th</sup> September 2006 at the Barcaldine Shire Council

The report draws on information provided in the one-to-one interviews, discussions at the town meeting and a number of informal conversations that were held with various town residents throughout the week. In addition the researchers have drawn on their own observations of the town, its operations, and its natural environment.

### **INITIAL IMPRESSIONS**

“Things don’t just happen. People make them happen”. If one quote were to sum up a common sentiment expressed by residents of Barcaldine, this is potentially it.

Throughout all discussions, the high levels of volunteer involvement by the majority of the town’s residents were evident across the wide array of community, sporting, historical and cultural activities.

Initial reactions to the idea of the research and what the research might achieve were largely positive, with a seemingly high level of awareness that the research was being conducted. This was facilitated by the inclusion of the project in the Shire’s Resident Newsletter. Numerous comments to the effect “I heard/read something about that” were heard in the researchers’ discussions.

There were, however, some concerning indications that not all townspeople understood the purpose of the research. Some had potentially misinterpreted it to an extent where they had formed a somewhat negative impression of the research objectives, but which they were prepared to re-think once the objectives were clarified for them. Two particular misconceptions that emerged were: that the townspeople were being asked to volunteer to entertain the grey nomads, and the other that the grey nomads would be paid to do particular jobs causing much concern that they would be taking jobs away from local people.

This highlights the importance of clear and consistent communication by the Action Group going forward to ensure that all stakeholders fully understand the project’s objectives so that they can make informed choices about their involvement and/or levels of support.

## **ABOUT FORMAL VOLUNTEERING**

Formal volunteering in Australia has a widely accepted and commonly understood definition which states that:<sup>1</sup>

*Volunteering is an activity which takes place in, or through, not for profit organizations or projects and is undertaken:*

- *To be of benefit to the community and the volunteer;*
- *Of the volunteer's own free will and without coercion;*
- *For no financial payment; and*
- *In designated volunteer positions only.*

In order for any grey nomad voluntary programs which are developed to be successful it is vital that they actively support, and do not undermine, this definition. Programs which do not operate within the context of this definition are unlikely to deliver the benefits that are sought, nor be sustainable.

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<sup>1</sup> National Standards for Involving Volunteers in Not for Profit Organisations (Volunteering Australia)  
p.62

## SWOT ANALYSIS

This section outlines what the researchers have discerned are the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of developing a volunteering project for grey nomads.

*STRENGTHS* - Barcaldine has many strengths. Those that are particularly relevant to the Grey Nomad Project include:

1. **The friendly people.** People wave and greet each other and strangers. There is a strong sense of friendliness and a willingness to work together and help those in need. There is a very high rate of volunteering, and numerous community based initiatives and organisations. It is a town of energy. There is also an acceptance of outsiders that doesn't always happen in small towns. Although there are many different groups in Barcaldine, there are no insurmountable "warring factions". In technical terms, there is a strong stock of social capital. Social capital is often as important as financial or natural capital. Sometimes the connections between people enable action with very little financial capital needed.
2. **A Safe Place.** There is very little crime, no major drug issues or theft. The streets are safe places to walk. They are also clean: no grime, very little graffiti or vandalism.
3. **The sound local economy.** The population of Barcaldine, at 1600 has remained stable for many years. There are a number of small businesses. While none of these are likely to grow into major industries, nonetheless they are, on the whole, stable. The Department of Main Roads and Queensland Railways provide important sources of employment. The business community appeared particularly dynamic, with the formation of the Business Retention and Expansion group. This group is innovative and has taken some important initiatives, including a survey of business opportunities and gaps. This group provides an important leadership potential in a community-wide initiative.
4. **A supportive Shire Council.** The Shire Council is the one organisation that has the broad reach of connections across all segments of the community. It also has important links to State and Federal Governments. It is thus in an ideal position to co-ordinate and support local initiatives, and where necessary, seek external funding opportunities. Barcaldine Shire Council is particularly supportive of local community initiatives within the normal resource constraints.
5. **A rich natural environment.** Even though Barcaldine is in a semi arid environment, there is a good supply of clean water from the Artesian basin. Energy is supplied from the local gas fired power station. The climate is mild for much of the year, and attracts many tourists during the winter season. There is also a rich diversity of fauna and flora, particularly bird life.
6. **An extremely rich history.** Barcaldine history is an important one for the Nation, particularly relating to the shearers strike and the subsequent formation of the Labour Party. The Heritage Centre is a major drawcard for a variety of visitors. For example, the one teacher school room and the Women and Labour exhibitions are really outstanding and draw many Grey Nomads. The Heritage trail around town, with interesting information on many heritage buildings, adds considerably to the interest of the town.

7. **A geographic location that is central.** While Barcaldine itself is listed as remote, it is nonetheless central to the region, and in particular is surrounded by small towns such as Aramac, Jericho and Isisford. Barcaldine is thus a potential centre for regional services as well as a natural stopping point for visitors who wish to explore the surrounding region.
8. **Campsites and facilities for tourists.** Barcaldine has a range of campsites from free camping at the weir, to cheap basic facilities at the showground to caravan parks providing full facilities. The town can handle the current number of travellers and believes they could handle many more. (eg they managed the CMCA rally for 2 thousand people in 2004)

*WEAKNESSES* - It is a bit hard to identify too many weaknesses, but there are a few. Some of these may potentially provide new opportunities:

1. **Few employment opportunities for young school leavers.** This means that many young people are forced to leave Barcaldine, not only for higher education, but for any employment. Unemployment schemes such as CDEP are short term and cannot in themselves provide ongoing employment. While some young people are able to return to Barcaldine later, others do not. Professional employment opportunities in some areas are limited.
2. **Skill shortage.** Despite the fact that there are few employment opportunities, there are also some serious skill shortages. These include mechanics, builders, doctors and other trades. It is hard to attract these people to stay in town, or to provide adequate training or the financial capital necessary to purchase state of art equipment.
3. **The summer is hot.** Grey nomads and other visitors tend to head south for the summer, thus reducing business income in town.
4. **Historical records are incomplete.** There is no visible record of the “other side” of history...who were the police/ troopers? The graziers who couldn't get their sheep sheared? Where were the Aboriginal people? Who were they and what happened to them? Even the current exhibits such as the museum, need updating.
5. **Advantage of existing town assets not maximised eg** The Heritage Centre is probably the major tourist attraction for the town. At present there is little sense of town “ownership” of the centre, little enthusiasm or use of it.

*OPPORTUNITIES* - Given the strengths that Barcaldine has, there are a number of opportunities that can be developed:

1. **The richness of the natural environment.** There is enormous potential to develop the natural environment for the mutual enjoyment and education of local residents and visitors alike. The “lagoon” area to the west of the town is being developed. Further development of seats and a bird hide would make this much more accessible and of great interest to many grey nomads. Various trees and other points of interest could be labelled and explained, such as the “gidyea tree”. Just the clean air, wide open spaces and starry skies are assets that have become rare in urban centres. The natural environment is an asset that most Barcaldines seem to take for granted. It is an asset that could be better used.
2. **The richness of Aboriginal history.** One of the tasks of reconciliation, is about reclaiming and publicly acknowledging the Aboriginal history. There is a massacre site near Aramac, an old Aboriginal camp near the lagoon, and an

archaeological site of unknown significance behind the golf course. These stories need to be researched and told.

3. **Better Promotion of key attractions.** The heritage centre could be “owned” and cared for and promoted within the town, bringing much better use of the asset.
4. **An army of grey nomads.** Grey nomads are not conventional tourists. While they typically have limited financial resources (they are not big spenders), they are on the road for many months, and have time. They frequently spend several weeks in one area, and use that time to learn as much as they can about the place, and to enjoy what that place has to offer. Many grey nomads have indicated that they would welcome the opportunity to volunteer their time and skills to give something back to the community, and to have the opportunity to get to know the locals more.
5. **CMCA rally** A specific opportunity is the rally next May and ongoing contact with CMCA.

*THREATS* - There are a few threats to Barcaldine and its grey nomads:

1. **Paid employment.** It is crucial that grey nomads, or any volunteer, does not in any way endanger paid employment by local residents. Volunteer work does not replace paid employment.
2. **Price of petrol.** As fuel becomes more expensive, grey nomads can afford to travel less. There may be fewer visitors, and less discretionary income to use for other services. On the other hand it may well be that grey nomads will therefore spend longer in one place, and be more available to assist in a local project that interests them.
3. **Medical resources.** Medical facilities are vital for all retired people, indeed for all people. It is crucial that medical facilities in particular be available for grey nomads as needed, but that they do not overload services for local residents.
4. **Overextending local goodwill.** While grey nomads have a lot to offer, any project, particularly a project involving volunteers, need to be properly co-ordinated. Volunteer co-ordination requires time and skill. We don't want to create burnout! This is a real danger if too many projects are launched with enthusiasm but inadequate planning or resourcing.
5. **Insurance and blue cards.** Public liability is important and many small volunteer organisations find this too expensive to fund. No volunteer may work with children without a Queensland Blue card/ police check. This may take time to organize.

## **IDEAS FOR COMMUNITY PROJECTS INVOLVING GREY NOMADS AS VOLUNTEERS**

Given the strengths and opportunities Barcaldine has, there are several good projects that could be developed:

1. Paving project: heritage paver trail, from shearer's strike but embracing all sides of the story. Needs historical research of records...sponsorship of individual pavers...laying the path.
2. Tombstone tours. Requires land care work and gardening/ landscaping. Requires genealogical research. Could be related to collection of oral histories from towns oldest residents (Del's book plus Bourganvillias DVD)
3. Developing new historical sites. Includes
  - Shearers' camp site on golf club road.
  - Aboriginal site behind golf course (perhaps a commemoration, keeping place for significant artefacts)
4. Development of Bird watching reserve, other natural heritage walkways, artesian springs??
5. Further development of "men's shed" with 60 and better group. Provide opportunities for Grey Nomads and local residents to exchange yarns and skills.
6. Schools career day project. Visiting grey nomads talk about their own career/ occupation/ trade.
7. A suggestion from the grey nomads out at the Weir: provide a list of jobs that council would like done at the Weir. This could include weeding, clearing, planting, painting tables etc.
8. Heritage Centre potentially provides opportunity for volunteer care, tours, promotion, or expansion of displays.
9. Other community buildings and displays need updating and repairs, eg museum, radio theatre, Barcaldine club

## **HOW TO PRIORITIZE**

Given the number and array of projects suggested an important first step for the Grey Nomads Project Action Group is the prioritisation and selection of a project/s.

Questions the group might find useful to ask in relation to each of the nominated projects include:

- Is the project one that would be supported by a wide range of townspeople?
- Is the project one that would benefit several groups within the community?
- Does the project provide an opportunity for several groups to work collaboratively together under the auspices of the Action Group?
- Is the project simple and achievable?
- If it is a large project, can it be broken down into smaller, more discrete components that can be managed in a staged way?
- Is the project one that would utilise a wide range of skills that grey nomads would have or is it only limited to one particular type of specialised skill (thereby making it harder to attract the number of grey nomad participants required to make the project a success)?
- Is there existing knowledge and resources in the town that are available to be accessed to support the project?
- Are the funds required for the project low enough to be achievable to acquire in a short period of time and/or is there a known and existing source of funding that could be readily accessed?
- Are there existing projects or amenities that the proposed project would build on or work collaboratively to support?
- Will there be opportunities to recognise the involvement of volunteers and their contribution to the successful completion of the project?

## **SUPPORT THAT VOLUNTEERING AUSTRALIA COULD PROVIDE TO ASSIST**

Volunteering Australia's role as Industry Partner in this research project provides a significant opportunity for hands-on advice and assistance to participating towns as projects are developed and implemented.

While a national organisation, based in Melbourne, the logistics of face-to-face support are clearly not possible, the majority of Volunteering Australia's work is now undertaken by phone and e-mail with it's website a major hub of resources intended to support, and assist the development of, volunteering.

The Action Group should consider Volunteering Australia as a key resource that it can access and turn to for advice and information as the project progresses. Kylee Bates, the Volunteering Australia representative for the Barcaldine project should be considered the primary contact. Contact details are provided below.

In addition, Volunteering Australia can provide:

- The Action Group with a complimentary set of the *National Standards for Involving Volunteers in Not for Profit Organisations* publications (3 in the set:

Standards, Implementation Guide and Workbook) to assist in developing a best practice approach to involving grey nomads as volunteers. Projects and programs that are most likely to be successful, sustainable and provide the greatest potential for growth and development are those that utilise the best practice framework for involving and managing volunteers that is outlined in the *National Standards*. National Standards do not set out a rigid compliance regime, instead they emphasise the importance of adopting a systems approach (one which is tailored to the needs of each organisation or project) to managing volunteers; an approach that aims to meet the needs of volunteers so that they in turn are able meet the needs of those to whom they provide a service.<sup>2</sup>;

- Formal contact to discuss volunteer involvement and management issues on a regular and scheduled basis as agreed (eg: Kylee Bates could set up a fortnightly / monthly e-mail or telephone exchange with the Action Group or one of it's members to provide advice as issues emerge)
- Availability as required by phone or e-mail as issues or questions emerge.
- Subscription to Volunteering Australia e-Newsletter *InVOLve* to assist in increasing knowledge and information about volunteering.
- Free access to training and education resources available on our website
- Information exchange facility as projects in other towns develop to assist in sharing practical learnings from the grey nomad voluntary programs.
- Free access to the GoVolunteer website to advertise the grey nomads voluntary program.
- Advice and support on promoting the Barcaldine Grey Nomads Volunteering Project through other mediums.
- Advice on possible funding avenues to support the project or new projects as they develop.

Contact details for Volunteering Australia are:

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid p. 7

### **Interviewees:**

Stuart Randle, Chief Executive Officer, Barcaldine Shire Council  
Louise Gronold, Arts Council  
Dell Aylett, Senior Citizens  
Jean Williams, 60's & Better Program  
Garry Bettiens, Capricornia Plumbing Supplies & Business Retention and Expansion Group  
Gay Gesch, Barcaldine Retravisoin & Business Retention and Expansion Group  
Graeme Biesel, Pharmacist & Business Retention and Expansion Group  
Kylie Owens, Tourism Officer, Barcaldine Shire Council  
Robin Rayner, School Principal  
Colleen Horn, Newsagent  
Beryl Thompson, Aboriginal Corporation  
John Bennetts, Campervan and Motor Home Association  
Jocelyn Bennetts, Campervan and Motor Home Association  
Mary Yip, Australian Workers Heritage Centre  
Colin Trew, Grey Nomad

### **Town Meeting Participants:**

Gloria McLean, Barcy Cancer Fund  
Lois Denley, Barcy Cancer Fund  
Jean Williams, Barcaldine 60 & Better  
Jocelyn Bennets, Barcy Cancer Fund  
John Bennets, Barcy Cancer Fund  
Robin Rayner, Barcaldine State School  
Kylie Owens, Barcaldine Tourist Association  
Ron Mills, Barcaldine Shire Council  
Colin Trew, Grey Nomad  
Janice Flowers, Rural Family Support, Barcy Shire Council  
Barry Bettiens, Capricorn Plumbing  
Lyal Balderson, Barcaldine Shire Council  
Lyn Batchelor, Barcaldine Shire council  
Gay Gesch, Barcaldine Retravisoin  
Simon Bourne, Geo Bourne & Associates  
Colleen Horn, Barcaldine News & Travel  
Dell Aylett, Barcaldine Senior Citizens  
Stuart Randle, Barcaldine Shire Council

### Interview Schedule for Grey Nomad Project; Host communities

The research project **New partnerships: Promoting development in outback towns through voluntary programs for Grey Nomads** is being conducted by Professor Jenny Onyx, Centre for Community Organisations and Management at UTS with Associate Professor Rosemary Leonard of University of Western Sydney and Volunteering Australia. Funding for this research has been provided by The Australian Research Council.

Grey Nomads include those over 50 years of age who undertake extensive travel within Australia, usually at least three months, with their own vehicles, usually a caravan or motor-home. They may stay in one town for as little as one day, or as long as several weeks.

The purpose of this study is to explore the possibility of developing mutually beneficial relationships between Grey Nomads and isolated rural communities through voluntary programs. This research aims to identify both what the Grey Nomads may be interested in contributing, and what each town would be interested in hosting. For that purpose, the researchers would like to interview as many people in each town as possible in order to develop a basic profile of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) for that town, and to negotiate with the host organization of the town, what kind of volunteer program could be developed. Such programs would enable the sharing of information and skills between locals and visitors and enable the development of local facilities and services. Engagement in such programs may also potentially enhance the Grey Nomad experience contributing to a healthy productive ageing lifestyle.

#### About Grey Nomads:

1. Are you aware of Grey Nomads coming to this town as travellers? Do you have any views about travellers generally and Grey Nomads in particular?
2. Have you had any personal contact or ongoing associations with any of the Grey Nomads.
3. Do you think the travellers bring income to the town?
4. Do you consider that people in this town have benefited (income, potential new knowledge or skills) from contact with the Grey Nomads?
5. Do you consider that existing services in the town are adequate for the travellers?
6. Do you have any sense of disruption to the life of the town from the travellers? Any other problems with Grey Nomads?

#### About the Town:

1. What is your role in the town? (Consider both paid and unpaid)
2. What organisations do you belong to?
3. What do you think are the most important organisations in town? Why do you say this?

4. Do you know what kind of connections there are between different organisations in town? Can you give any examples of where several organisations have worked together to meet a common goal?
5. Do these organisations have useful links to other places, eg links to government bodies, centres with more services? Can you give some examples?
6. Are there any divisions or conflicts in town that we need to be aware of as we undertake this research project? How do you think this impacts on the town?
7. Are young people able to find jobs and stay in town?
8. How do you attract people to town?
9. Do you have a shortage of skills in town? What kind of skills are in short supply?
10. What do you think is the best aspect of the natural environment in this area?
11. What do you consider to be the biggest natural environmental problem?
12. What is the major industry in this area?
13. Do you consider that the economy is in good shape or not? Why do you think this?
14. Does the town have the services it needs? What gaps are there?
15. What is the greatest strength of this town?
16. Overall what would you say is the biggest issue facing the town?
17. What kind of program could help solve the problem/ close the gap

**About Volunteering :**

1. Are most people involved in their community? Is there a high rate of volunteering? Give an example
2. Which organisations have formal volunteering programs?
3. Do you know of any volunteering generally done now by Grey Nomads in this town?
4. Would you like to see greater involvement by Grey Nomads as volunteers in your town?
5. Do you consider that the town could benefit from specific volunteer projects which involve Grey Nomads? What would they be?
6. What would be needed to encourage and support this?

**Nominations to Grey Nomads Project Action Group**

Stuart Randle  
Colleen Horn  
Graeme Biesel  
Jean Williams  
Dell Aylett (time permitting)  
Colin Trew (input as grey nomad as available)  
Louise Gronold  
Simon Bourne  
Ron Mills

**New partnerships: Promoting development in outback towns through voluntary programs for Grey Nomads**

**Contact Details**

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