

# Involved and valued?

## Findings from a National Survey of Australian Volunteers from Diverse Cultural and Linguistic Backgrounds

### Introduction

During 2005 the Australian Multicultural Foundation and Volunteering Australia completed wide ranging research into the volunteering activities of people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds in Australia. The research was funded by the Australian Government Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. The research was both qualitative and quantitative in scope. The key results are outlined in this bulletin.

Official statistics indicate 25% of people in Australia who were born overseas participate in volunteering.<sup>1</sup> Despite a great deal of interest within the volunteering sector, relatively little detailed research has been conducted around the experiences and participation characteristics of CALD volunteers. The aims of the Australian Multicultural Foundation and Volunteering Australia research are:

- to determine patterns at a national level of the voluntary contribution to Australian society of people of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds;
- to collect information from volunteer-involving organisations about the participation of volunteers from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds in their organisation; and
- to promote best practice in the recruitment and deployment of volunteers in advancing Australia's social and economic life.

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<sup>1</sup> AUSTRALIAN BUREAU OF STATISTICS (2001) VOLUNTARY WORK SURVEY P 4

The research comprised a literature review, and surveys of hundreds of CALD volunteers and not for profit organisations involving volunteers.

The research revealed that both participation in volunteering, and time spent in volunteering, by CALD volunteers is substantial. In addition, the research has generated information about recruiting CALD volunteers, the motivations of CALD volunteers and barriers to involvement in mainstream organisations experienced by CALD volunteers. Barriers experienced by mainstream not for profit organisations in involving CALD volunteers are also explored.

These findings will be of interest to organisations who wish to diversify their volunteer population.

The full research report features expanded sections on the above themes, as well as data around the types of work commonly performed by CALD volunteers and who is served by CALD volunteers. A discussion of findings for each CALD group that participated in the research is also available in the full report.

## **Methodology**

The research comprised two major stages. The first stage involved reviewing the literature on CALD volunteers. The literature review informed the development of the second stage, the collection of data from CALD volunteers and volunteer-involving not for profit organisations, using written questionnaires translated into 10 community languages.<sup>2</sup> The questionnaires for volunteers were developed in consultation with community leaders from the selected CALD communities and piloted among volunteers from the selected communities. The questionnaires were distributed to volunteers through ethno-specific community organisations, and to not for profit organisations through the national network of volunteer centres.

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<sup>2</sup> THE COMMUNITIES SELECTED TO PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH WERE THE ARABIC, MANDARIN AND CANTONESE SPEAKING COMMUNITIES AND THE ITALIAN, POLISH, GREEK, CROATIAN, SPANISH, VIETNAMESE AND MACEDONIAN COMMUNITIES.

## Survey Respondents

Sixty-eight percent of the respondents to the volunteer survey were female, 30% were male and 2% did not identify their gender. The age profile showed that 45% of respondents were over 60 years old, with the next two common age groupings being 51 - 60 (21%) and 41 - 50 (16%).

In the survey of not for profit organisations, 96% of organisational respondents were 'mainstream' organisations, 2% identified as 'multicultural' working specifically with multicultural groups and 2% worked specifically with one ethnic group only. The most commonly occurring sector of the respondent organisations was the community/welfare sector (62%), followed by the educational/youth/training sector (12%).

## Participation in volunteering

The research indicated that CALD volunteers are making a significant contribution to the community both as formal volunteers and by way of informal volunteering activities. This contribution is being felt both in ethno-specific settings, and in the mainstream community, with 56% of CALD volunteers surveyed involved in both their own ethnic community and the broader community.

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Participation is not confined to long term Australian residents from CALD backgrounds, with 16% of CALD volunteers surveyed having arrived in the country in the last 10 years.

The definition of volunteering<sup>3</sup> states that formal volunteering is an activity which takes place through not for profit organisations 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.

Informal volunteering occurs outside the definition of formal volunteering (i.e. outside not for profit organisations, and without a volunteer position description). The term informal volunteering includes helping out neighbours and community members. Past research has tended to suggest that CALD volunteers are heavily involved in informal volunteering.

## Participation in formal volunteering

The questionnaire of volunteer-involving organisations found that, on average, 21% of volunteers engaged in formal volunteering through mainstream organisations are from a CALD background.

Most volunteers from CALD backgrounds in the formal setting are involved in assisting people within their own communities (64%) and assisting the elderly (54%).

## Informal volunteering

The common view that CALD volunteers make a significant contribution as informal volunteers is supported by the Australian Multicultural Foundation and Volunteering Australia research. The research shows 72% of the CALD volunteers surveyed are involved in informal volunteering. The types of activities volunteers from CALD backgrounds undertake are very similar to those working in the formal setting. Helping the elderly and people of their own cultural background are common.

## Time contributed to volunteering

The research indicates CALD volunteers contribute a substantial amount of time to formal and informal volunteering, indicating a high level of community engagement through unpaid work.

As formal volunteers 49% of the CALD volunteers surveyed spend 1-2 days a week volunteering. Similarly, within the informal sector the majority of volunteers (31%) contribute 1-2 days a week. Therefore, many of those CALD volunteers who are involved in both formal and informal volunteering, give between 2-4 days a week to volunteer work. Very few of the volunteers from CALD backgrounds give less than a day a month in either the formal or informal sectors.

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## Motivations and barriers for organisations in involving CALD volunteers

Many of the organisations surveyed acknowledge the benefits that involving CALD volunteers can bring to their organisation. These benefits include:

- CALD volunteers can bring knowledge of their own culture to the organisation. Many not for profit organisations indicated that knowledge obtained in this way is helpful to staff working to provide a more culturally sensitive service to other people from the same background.
- CALD volunteers can potentially help connect their community with the service provided by the not for profit organisation they contribute time to. This may take the form of promoting the service to their community or delivering the service directly to clients from the same CALD background.
- CALD volunteers may bring bilingual skills into the organisation. This is primarily useful in interactions with clients from the same CALD background and provides a means of reaching new clients.
- Promoting cross cultural understanding of staff, clients and other volunteers. This was often identified as having benefits for the cultural sensitivity of services.
- Promoting diversity within organisations. For some organisations achieving diversity is a positive outcome in itself, so that their organisation can reflect the diversity of the broader Australian population, and maintain an inclusive organisational culture.

Ideas among not for profit organisations around what barriers exist to recruiting CALD volunteers vary. Thirty-five per cent of organisations reported that they face no barriers to recruiting CALD volunteers.

Where barriers were identified to involving CALD volunteers, language barriers was the most common barrier identified by volunteer-involving organisations. Forty-two per cent of organisations identified language barriers as presenting a barrier to involving CALD volunteers. Organisations identified as areas of concern the comprehension of volunteers' rights and obligations, important safety issues and training delivered in English. For those who provide services for the elderly or people with disabilities, accents are an issue for clients with hearing or other communication problems.

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The next most common barrier was 'cultural issues'. Issues that emerged from the qualitative data further defined this concern as being about cross-cultural differences and understanding the Australian context in which they volunteer. Eighteen per cent of organisations identified 'cultural issues' as a barrier to involving CALD volunteers.

## Motivations and barriers to volunteering for CALD volunteers

The reasons that motivate CALD volunteers to volunteer are similar to those reasons found in the broader community.<sup>4</sup> The strongest motivations to volunteer among the CALD volunteers surveyed are:

- to do something worthwhile
- help own community
- personal satisfaction

Acting in accordance with spiritual beliefs is also an important motivator for many respondents. The motivations for volunteering are slightly different for migrants who have lived in Australia for less than 10 years, with social contact and gaining work experience also strong motivations for volunteering among that group.

The CALD volunteers surveyed indicated that of the barriers to volunteering they experience, time restrictions are the main barrier, followed by travel and distance, reimbursement of expenses and also English language proficiency. The main group of CALD volunteers who consider English language proficiency as a barrier to volunteering are over 60 years of age.

## Recruitment Methods

The research found that having a targeted recruitment strategy is a major success factor for attracting CALD volunteers. Twenty-six per cent of organisations surveyed actively recruit volunteers from CALD backgrounds. The remaining 74% of organisations do not actively recruit CALD volunteers.

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Those organisations who actively recruit had a mean of 38% CALD volunteers in their organisation, whereas those who did not actively recruit had a mean of 20% CALD volunteers. These results suggest that actively recruiting CALD volunteers results in greater numbers of CALD volunteers.

## Recruitment strategies

A wide range of recruitment methods used by organisations which actively target CALD volunteers were explored and evaluated for effectiveness. The various recruitment methods explored included (but were not restricted to) media advertising, word of mouth, reaching CALD volunteers through other community organisations, websites, translated brochures and promotion through ethno-specific media or groups.

Attracting CALD volunteers through word of mouth is the most successful recruitment strategy for organisations to attract CALD volunteers. Seventy-two per cent of organisations who target CALD volunteers for recruitment use word of mouth as a recruitment strategy.

The importance of word of mouth as a means of attracting culturally diverse volunteers is consistent with official statistics for the mainstream population, which indicate word of mouth (knowing someone involved or being asked to assist) is the most common means of volunteers hearing about and becoming involved with an organisation.<sup>5</sup>

Other methods of recruitment commonly used by organisations that target CALD volunteers include promoting community groups, media advertising and giving presentations which profile the work of their own organisation.

Qualitative data collected from volunteer-involving organisations suggest the development of partnerships with other community organisations can have a positive impact on the successful recruitment of CALD volunteers.

A second set of data around recruiting CALD volunteers was conducted among volunteers of a culturally and linguistically diverse background. The results for volunteers finding volunteer work were consistent with those described above for organisations. The most common way CALD volunteers found out about the organisations where they volunteered were through friends/family and through community clubs/organisations.

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## Conclusion

The research conducted by the Australian Multicultural Foundation and Volunteering Australia indicates a high level of participation in both formal and informal volunteering in Australia by people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Many individual CALD volunteers combine formal and informal volunteering activities, and contribute a substantial amount of time to volunteering activities.

The participation of CALD volunteers is felt both in the settings of their own CALD community and in the mainstream community, with over half of the CALD volunteers surveyed involved in both ethno-specific and mainstream community organisations.

While acknowledging the benefits of involving CALD volunteers, many organisations and volunteers identified barriers to the involvement of CALD volunteers in mainstream not for profit organisations. A number of recommendations were developed as a result of the research to assist organisations in addressing these barriers. These are:

1. That, a train the trainer program on involving CALD volunteers be delivered to state volunteering centres so that they can develop training relevant to their own states and deliver the program to organisations within their states.
2. That a 'how to do it' kit should be produced which includes aspects on:
  - a. How to access ethnic media
  - b. How to access/build networks with communities
  - c. Where to go for resources e.g. translated materials, cultural kits, demographics
3. A Best Practice Manual should be developed for recruitment and retention of volunteers from CALD background, including case studies.
4. To ensure that the findings and practical implications of this study be distributed nationally to community groups, volunteer involving organisations and all levels of government.

These recommendations are informing the development of a range of resources and tools to support volunteer involving non for profit organisations to involve volunteers from CALD backgrounds.

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