



Promising Practice Profiles

Project title	Gateways
Project practice	Volunteering as a pathway to education, employment and civic participation
Project undertaken by	Springvale Community Aid and Advice Bureau Inc (SCAAB), Melbourne (Vic)
Start date	October 2004
Focal areas	Supporting families and parents
Program	Local Answers
Issue	<p>The City of Greater Dandenong has one of the most culturally diverse populations in Victoria, with more than 150 nationalities living in the area (City of Greater Dandenong, 2008). Many recently arrived refugees and special humanitarian program entrants relocate to this part of metropolitan Melbourne upon arrival. Local Government statistics show that the area is the most disadvantaged municipality in Victoria with higher than average unemployment rates and lower than median weekly income compared to the metropolitan average (City of Greater Dandenong, 2008). Social isolation is an issue that is confronted by newly arrived migrants and refugees (Kyle et al., 2004). In order to address the issues of unemployment, low income and social isolation, Springvale Community Aid and Advice Bureau (SCAAB) created the <i>Gateways Project</i>. The project provides capacity building opportunities for the disadvantaged members of the community through a unique volunteering approach in order to enhance participants' resilience and self-reliance.</p>
Program context	<p>Program setting</p> <p>The Springvale Community Aid and Advice Bureau (SCAAB) is a community-based organisation which provides information, practical services and support for people in the community. It is a mainstream provider in a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) community and provides specialised CALD programs that complement the general services offered. The combination of generalist services and CALD specific services at SCAAB enables CALD community members to access and participate in community life.</p> <p>The Bureau offers a "front door" to anyone in the community seeking information or assistance through a daily drop-in session as well as specific-purpose appointments. Issues may involve settlement, child support, financial or emotional matters, long term unemployment and personal crises such as retrenchment, family separation, illness and homelessness. The service principles of SCAAB state: "everyone has the right to adequate information about their rights, access to the services they need, assistance in times of hardship, and representation on their behalf if needed. We seek to both ensure these are available and work towards a stronger, fairer community. The services we provide are free and confidential." (www.vicnet.net.au/~scaab/)</p> <p>Services include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Information, Referral, Advocacy and Support Services</i>—Community information and Advice, Emergency Relief; School Relief Packages; Toy Shop

- *Settlement Services*—African and Generalist Settlement; Refugee Brokerage
- *Income and Support Services*—Personal Support; Counselling; Financial Counselling; Child Support
- *Youth Links*—Information, Referral, Advocacy and Support; Supported Accommodation Assistance; Job Placement, Employment and Training; Employment, Education and Training; African Youth Settlement

The Gateways Project

The Volunteering Gateways to Inclusion for Diverse and Disadvantaged Communities (Gateways) Project, which is the focus of this Profile, commenced operation in October 2004. The project was located within SCAAB's Volunteer Program which has a long established and well recognised commitment to recruit, train and support volunteers to play a key role in SCAAB's community building and service delivery activities:

The Volunteering Gateways Project has enabled the Bureau to build upon this experience by focussing more specifically on ways to recruit, train and support volunteers from diverse and disadvantaged backgrounds, to involve them in a wider range of the Bureau's programs and to identify outcomes for the volunteers, for their families and communities, for the Bureau and its clients, and to consider broader outcomes and potential impacts. (Frederico & Jones, 2007, p. i)

The Gateways Project is distinguished from traditional volunteer programs in its attention to the role that volunteering can play in culturally and linguistically diverse communities, in particular in enhancing:

- employment and education opportunities for diverse and disadvantaged members of the community; and
- civic participation among members of CALD communities, including the newly arrived, in addressing the issue of social isolation.

Specifically, the Gateways Project's objectives are to:

1. recruit and support a volunteer team that reflects the diversity of the clients who use the Bureau;
2. provide access to more inclusive and responsive training for volunteers from diverse and disadvantaged backgrounds in Greater Dandenong;
3. build formal and informal partnerships which improve pathways to volunteering for members of diverse and disadvantaged communities in Greater Dandenong; and
4. contribute to knowledge and fuller understanding of volunteering issues and the ways in which volunteering leads to civic participation for members of diverse and disadvantaged communities in Greater Dandenong.

From its establishment in October 2004 to June 2007, *Gateways* has recruited, trained and matched 145 new volunteers. Of these volunteers, : 74% came from CALD backgrounds and 35% arrived in Australia within the previous five years. Following their training, volunteers have participated in a range of SCAAB programs including: information, referral, advocacy and support; reception and administration; Tax Help, Counselling, Youth Links and as home volunteers in the Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Services.

Practice description

The key ingredients of effective practice for the *Gateways* Project are:

- familiarisation training;
- personal training record;
- accredited training;
- quarterly training and group support meeting;
- povision of diverse work experience;
- provision of personal volunteer supervision and mentoring;
- learnings from volunteer feedback;
- volunteer recognition; and
- Best Practice Standard in Volunteering

Familiarisation training

Familiarisation training is done at the start of the volunteer experience and is made up of a SCAAB Orientation Session; and a Program Orientation Session (i.e., orientation to the particular program with which the volunteer will be involved). The SCAAB Orientation looks at: the history of the Bureau; its many programs and services; rights and responsibilities of volunteers; issues of confidentiality and boundaries; and the Bureau evacuation and emergency procedures. The Program Orientation covers the details of that specific program and trains the volunteer on the skills needed to do the work in the program. This training gives the volunteers a good understanding of what is expected of them as volunteers.

Personal training record

The Personal Training Record identifies the on-going training requirements of each volunteer provided during the probation period of 3 months. This includes assignments and tasks that will help them understand their work system. The training approach taken allows the volunteers to learn at their own pace. The training record standardises the learning process for all volunteers in the particular program and ensures quality in training. The record format has three sections: the first is common to all volunteers; the second section is specific to the training needs of the program to which they have been allocated; and the final section provides a place to record other training and events attended (a copy can be made available through the project contact).

Accredited training

Interviewing volunteers (i.e., volunteers attached to the Information, Referral, Advocacy and Support Services Program) do an accredited training on "Assessing and Delivering Services to Clients with Complex Needs". This trains the volunteer in in-depth interviewing skills and effective client communication with the use of techniques such as "buddy interviews" in which they observe an interview and are asked to draft case file notes based on what they have observed. In addition, the training expands volunteers' knowledge on relevant community services and resources available. Ultimately, it trains the volunteers up to be effective community information workers.

Quarterly training and group support meeting

Quarterly training and group support meetings are held for interviewing, reception and home volunteers. Topics covered include: confidentiality; boundaries; team building; working with difficult clients. This approach trains the volunteers in issues that are very relevant to their work and provides the opportunity for the main volunteer teams to meet others within their team and in doing so share learnings and build team cohesion.

Matching and provision of diverse work experience

Diverse work experience is provided in the areas of community information work, casework, counselling, home volunteering, administration, reception, finance, job placement youth mentoring, migration work and special projects. At their initial recruitment interview with the Volunteer Coordinator, volunteers are matched to a program based on their interests, skills and knowledge. Volunteers can straddle training and participation in two programs if they are assessed as suitable for both. This usually occurs when the volunteer has previous experience or training in one or more areas. This flexibility enables volunteers a chance to skill up quickly in their area of choice. Given that the large majority of volunteers are from CALD backgrounds, unemployed and seeking paid work the approach best supports them to efficiently and confidently develop the work experience and local work knowledge needed to gain employment.

Provision of personal volunteer supervision and mentoring

Provision of individual supervision and mentoring of the volunteers is undertaken by professional welfare and social workers. Volunteers with client contact get case supervision on each and every case, which allows for de-briefing and reflection on the issues arising in each of the cases encountered. Supervision

proves to be a very strong learning tool for volunteers. The supervision and mentoring complement training and allow volunteers to familiarise themselves with work systems, processes and culture in a professional work environment within the community sector. This can only enhance their employability.

Learnings from volunteer feedback

As a new program concept the use of action learning processes have been critical to the project's development. Volunteer feedback is gained through volunteer satisfaction surveys that are distributed when a volunteer begins and when s/he exits. Learnings are gained from the feedback and incorporated into the program design. These surveys and project reports are also provided as data for the formal evaluation process undertaken by independent consultants (Frederico & Jones, 2007).

Volunteer recognition

Volunteers are recognised and their achievements celebrated. Volunteer achievements are recognised and celebrated through the International Volunteer Day, National Volunteer Week, Tax Help Celebration, Tax Help Presentation Ceremony and a joint annual End-of-the-year Party with paid staff members. Volunteers are provided a certificate of service and a gift of appreciation annually. Written and verbal references can also be provided by the Volunteer Coordinator upon request. This is useful for the volunteer in the job search process.

Best practice standard in volunteering

Included below is the Gateways Project Best Practice Standards in Volunteering document which was prepared by SCAAB and nominated for the 2006 NAB Award in Best Practice Standard in Volunteering. It has since been the main guiding document in directing and maintaining best practice in volunteering at SCAAB (Leong, 2007).

Best practice standard in volunteering

Program request for volunteer

- The Program Coordinator puts in a volunteer request using a Volunteer Request Form which is approved by the Program Manager. The form includes number of volunteers needed, skills and hours a week needed, preferred days, job description if it is a new volunteering area.

Volunteer recruitment and selection

- All volunteers go through the same selection process.
- An initial interview is undertaken to gauge suitability, provide information about the Bureau and its programs and volunteer requirements. Suitability is based on genuine interest, commitment and proficiency in English. Volunteers are interviewed and employed in accordance with equal opportunity and anti-discrimination legislation as outlined in the Rights of the Volunteer in the National Standards for involving volunteers in Not-for-Profit Organisations.
- Professional volunteers who are trained and qualified in their area of volunteering go through more intensive screening as they volunteer in specialist areas (i.e., Counselling, Reception, etc.) They will be interviewed by a Program Manager or Coordinator. Upon a successful application, professional volunteers receive an appointment letter from the Bureau.
- Volunteers need to complete a satisfactory police check before commencing.

Volunteer allocation

- Volunteers are then channelled into their area(s) of interest. This occurs by, for example, an introduction to the link person/task supervisor and handover of information.

Volunteer induction

- All new volunteers attend two Orientation Training sessions before their start date. The first session is the Bureau Orientation Training, is delivered by the Volunteer Coordinator and covers:
 - history of the bureau;
 - bureau programs and services;
 - rights and responsibilities of volunteers;
 - confidentiality and boundaries; and
 - bureau evacuation and emergency procedures.
- During this first session, volunteers also receive an information kit, which consists of:
 - Bureau and Program brochures;
 - Annual Report;
 - volunteer rights and boundaries;
 - Bureau organisational chart;
 - Bureau policies and procedures: volunteer, critical incident and debriefing policies and emergency evacuation plan;
 - application form;
 - code of ethics;
 - deed poll of confidentiality pro forma;
 - police check application form as all volunteers are required to do a police check; and
 - duty statement: interviewers, administration, reception or home volunteers or others as appropriate.
- At the end of this first session, volunteers are introduced to their colleagues and the physical layout of the building.
- The second Orientation session is the Program Orientation Training delivered by the Program Coordinator and covers one of the topics below:
 - IRASS, Assertiveness Training and Effective Client Communication (interviewers);
 - IHSS and Home Volunteering Program (IHSS Home Volunteers);
 - reception skills (reception volunteers); and
 - other as appropriate
- Administrative volunteers are exempted from the Program Orientation Training and are given on-the-job training instead.
- Observation visits are then organised when they observe the working systems of the programs they choose to be in (except for the IHSS Home Volunteers). During these visits, IRASS, Reception and Administrative volunteers go through the tasks identified in their specific Personal Training Records.
- The last stage is to confirm the working days and roster hours.
- There is a 3-month probation period after which there is a review.

Volunteer training

- After the Orientation training, IRASS volunteers go on to attend a one day Information Session and the Community Information Workers Course run by Community Information Victoria Inc. The purpose of the former is to outline the roles of the Bureaus and of Community Information Workers. The latter is an accredited 50 hour training called "Assess and Deliver Services to Clients with Complex Needs". This course is designed to introduce participants to basic interviewing techniques covering communication skills, client needs identification, using information resources and information retrieval, recording statistics and writing up client records. Participants observe interviews with experienced staff members. After successful completion of this course, the worker will undertake the minimum of 12 sessions (3 months) of supervision, which can vary depending on volunteer's previous work experience and/or training. During this period, a volunteer can interview on their own, but all information to be given to clients is checked by the Duty Worker. Volunteers who are studying or have completed a relevant recognised course (i.e., Diploma of

Community Services, Degree in Social Work) may be exempted from the accredited training.

- Volunteers with IRASS, Reception and IHSS Home Volunteers are also required to attend separate and specialised quarterly training as well as monthly group support meetings organised by the Program and Volunteer Coordinators and delivered by the Program Coordinator and workers.
- All volunteers are also invited to participate in the Bureau's internal training program for staff members.
- All volunteers will have a personal training record which records training undertaken and signed off by program worker or task supervisor.

Volunteer supervision

- Volunteers are assigned a Program worker who will task or case supervise them, support them on a day-to-day basis and provide any necessary on-the-job training. The volunteer will be provided general support by the Volunteer Coordinator.
- The role of Program worker includes a probation review, signing the personal training record, etc.

Volunteer identification

- Volunteers will be provided with a coloured name tag with the Bureau logo and volunteer name. Volunteers sign in when they receive them and sign out when they exit the Volunteer Program and return the tags. If tags are not returned, a reference may not be provided.

Research base

The Greater Dandenong area, in which SCAAB is located, is situated in the South Eastern outer metropolitan area of Melbourne. The community is culturally diverse and experiences significant disadvantage. The following characteristics of the community have been drawn from Local Government statistics:

- 54% of Greater Dandenong residents were born overseas from over 150 different birthplaces and 48% are from non-English speaking backgrounds.
- In 2006–07, 2,600 recently arrived immigrants settled in Greater Dandenong—accounting for 11% of all settlement in Victoria and representing the largest intake of any municipality in the state. Among them were 860 people who came to Australia as refugees or other humanitarian settlers, from countries such as Afghanistan, Sudan, Burma, Kenya and Ethiopia. These immigrants accounted for over a quarter (28%) of all humanitarian settlement in Victoria.
- In 2004–05, 640 recently arrived refugees/special humanitarian program entrants settled in Greater Dandenong (100 in Springvale; and, 220 in Noble Park).
- In 2006, the unemployment rate in Springvale was 9.9%, and in Noble Park, 6.5% (6.9% in Greater Dandenong overall), compared to the metropolitan average of 4.8%.
- In 2001, median weekly income [aged 15 or more] in Springvale was \$249, \$306 in Noble Park and \$296 in Greater Dandenong, compared to the metropolitan average of \$405.
- Springvale and Noble Park are among the most disadvantaged 1% and 8% of Victorian suburbs.
- Greater Dandenong is the most disadvantaged municipality in Victoria (City of Greater Dandenong, 2007, 2008).

In Melbourne, the largest concentrations of overseas-born are found in the central, south-eastern and western parts of the city (Markus & Dharmalingam, 2008). Furthermore, 61.5% of the residents of Greater Dandenong speak a language other than English in their homes with 25.5% speaking English not well or not at all (Markus & Dharmalingam, 2008).

The following discussion of relevant social capital theoretical material and research literature supports the premise of Gateways that:

- CALD volunteering addresses the issue of social isolation among the newly arrived in Greater Dandenong;

- CALD volunteering addresses the issues of unemployment, low income and disadvantage in Greater Dandenong; and
- CALD volunteering encourages civic participation among people from diverse backgrounds and enhances social cohesion.

Volunteering is linked and often seen as synonymous with “active citizenship” and thus the level of volunteering is a relevant indicator of active citizenship (Kerr & Tedmanson, 2003). The social capital literature sees active citizenship as being recognised by the state as an antidote to social exclusion and marginalisation. Volunteering and active citizenship are “measures of social well-being and individual functionality, commitment and inclusion in the wider community” (Kerr & Tedmanson, 2003, p. 25).

Consistent with other social capital writers such as Labonte (1997) and Putnam (1993), Bailey et al. (2003) argued that “engagement in public participation, which includes volunteer activity, has been shown to result in a direct improvement in the health and wellbeing of many people by overcoming isolation and perceived powerlessness” (p. 5). In their study of social cohesion in the south east of the Melbourne metropolitan area, Markus and Dharmalingam (2008) found that the level of volunteering is an indicator of community engagement/participation, which in turn is an indicator of social cohesion.

A study by Ernest Healy showed that ethnically diverse neighbourhoods have lower levels of volunteering than homogenous communities (Healey, 2007). Markus and Dharmalingam’s (2008) study showed that “NESB (Non-English-speaking-background) Australians are half as likely to participate in voluntary work as long-time Australians” (p. 5). However, social participation can also be limited by factors such as socio-economic status, and poverty which are “a major contributing factor to social exclusion and isolation” (VicHealth, 2008, p. 4).

In their study of the experience of refugees in the Victorian labour market Kyle, Macdonald, Doughney, and Pyke (2004) suggested that employment and economic independence are seen as important elements of successful settlement for many migrants and refugees/special humanitarian entrants. This is because meaningful employment is linked to a positive self identity, financial independence and aid the process of establishing a sense of home in a new country” (Kyle et al., 2004).

There is scant research literature on the influence of volunteering on employment in culturally and linguistically diverse communities. It is argued that most volunteer programs do not operate as pathways towards employment. On the contrary, most programs try to retain volunteers, particularly as they have often made significant investments in their recruitment, selection and training. Often volunteer programs run primarily to support the agency and its services rather than responding to a social need of volunteers (Leong, 2008). In such cases, these traditional volunteer programs have operated as an end in themselves and not a “means to an end”. The *Gateways* project was designed to use the process of volunteering as a means to achieve objectives of social inclusion, education and employment.

<p>Outcomes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gateways has successfully recruited and supported volunteers from diverse cultural, linguistic and socio-economic backgrounds. • Gateways has developed and sensitively implemented inclusive and supportive training responsive to the needs of volunteers. • Gateways’ volunteering process has acted as a pathway to education and employment for those from diverse and disadvantaged communities in Greater Dandenong. • Gateways’ volunteering process has acted as a pathway to social inclusion and civic participation for those from diverse and disadvantaged communities in Greater Dandenong.
<p>Evidence of outcomes</p>	<p>Volunteer profiles</p> <p>A key objective of the Gateways project was to successfully recruit volunteers from CALD communities consistent with the profile of clients using SCAAB. An initial recruitment strategy that utilised information outreach “has been</p>

increasingly replaced by “word-of-mouth” publicity within existing local and regional community groups and networks together with a more “targeted” approach matching recruitment volunteers with the skills for the volunteering opportunities available” (Frederico & Jones, 2007, pp. 8–9). This has resulted in an increased rate of recruitment and a more consistent match between the profile of the volunteer group and that of the broader Dandenong community.

During the period October 2004–June 2007, 74% of volunteer recruits were of CALD background and 35% had arrived in Australia during the last 5 years (Frederico & Jones, 2007). This trend seems to be increasing with 90.6% of the 53 recruits in the first half of 2008 being from CALD backgrounds and 47.2% newly arrived (Local Answers Round Five Progress Performance Report, 15 April 2008). In addition Frederico and Jones’ (2007) reported that 53% of recruits were unemployed/looking for work and 71% were on government pension or benefit.

Women made up the majority (72%) of volunteers. Although all age groups were represented, the majority (57%) of volunteers were aged between 25 and 44 years. First language spoken was English (46%) and then a range from Indian sub continent, Sinhalese and Tamil, Cantonese and other Chinese languages, Vietnamese, Bosnian and Spanish. This range was largely reflective of the client profile at SCAAB although there were no identified African, Arabic or Khmer speakers amongst the volunteer group (Frederico & Jones, 2007). The latter trend is changing as more African and Burmese volunteers were recruited in late 2007 and 2008.

Responsive training model

Following their recruitment, selection and matching processes, the training offered to volunteers participating in Gateways included: organisational and program specific orientation; a supervised probationary period; ongoing professional supervision, mentoring and support; individual job-seeking skills training; and, both internal and external dedicated and accredited training events. For example: 30 volunteers completed a 50-hour accredited Community Information Workers’ Course; English as a Second Language (delivered internally after successful submission for funding); Tax Helper training (provided by the Australian Tax Office).

All training was recorded for each individual on their training record sheet. In house training processes were trialled using various approaches and, based on volunteer feedback, regular quarterly sessions were considered the most viable. The learning-based culture and the culturally inclusive nature of SCAAB was also evidenced, for example, in enabling volunteers to attend internal training opportunities offered to paid staff.

Pathway to education and employment

Seventy-one percent of volunteers surveyed stated that their main reason for volunteering was to gain work experience (Frederico & Jones, 2007).

The volunteer satisfaction surveys (October 2005–July 2007 in which 73 volunteers participated) showed that 84% of volunteers reported an increase in skills to get into education, further vocational training and employment, with 40% reporting a large increase.

Of the 43 volunteers surveyed on leaving volunteering, 51% reported they left the Bureau because they had found paid work, many in their area of volunteering within the community and administrative sectors, and a further 23% exited because of educational commitments (Frederico & Jones, 2007).

Pathway to social inclusion and civic participation

Volunteering allowed individuals from newly arrived, isolated and disadvantaged communities to engage in social interaction with others (i.e., the other volunteers and paid professionals at SCAAB, in a professional work environment). This was particularly useful for full-time mothers and carers whose time and energy revolved around the private sphere of home and the needs of the family, or newly arrived migrants who were not yet familiar with their new environment. Social interaction, and the act of assisting others through volunteering, was intended as an effective process in addressing experiences of social isolation

and to increase confidence levels. The training and work experience aimed to improve their work knowledge and skills could only heighten their confidence and self-worth. This was reflected in evaluation data, which showed that 84% of volunteers surveyed reported increased confidence, with 47% reporting a large increase (Frederico & Jones, 2007).

It is interesting to note that in his study on volunteerism at the Bureau, Sheppard (2005) determined that 40% of Bureau volunteers were former SCAAB clients. This showed that the volunteering experience had moved many from an experience of service user to one of assisting and resourcing others. In addition to the sense of empowerment experienced by volunteers, this dynamic also reflects the capacity of *Gateway* to impact on experience of economic disadvantage.

When volunteers eventually moved into paid employment, as many did, their household incomes increased and they and their families achieved some financial independence and became less dependent on social welfare. Being involved in paid work further reduced whatever sense of social isolation experienced, as they participated actively and “meaningfully” in society. Financial compensation through salaries provided recognition of their contribution. Volunteering could enhance economic self-reliance and with that, confidence and self-worth.

Many of the volunteers indicated that employment was their preferred form of civic participation (Frederico & Jones, 2007). This was particularly true for heads of households (both male and female) who suffered when they could not participate actively in society through employment to sustain their families. Male heads of migrant households often came from societies that saw their most important role as breadwinners and providers for their families. It also affected highly educated migrant women and men who held significant work positions in their home countries in their field of training and had contributed significantly to the household income. For women who might depend financially on their partners, securing employment increased their financial independence.

The experience of volunteering also increased volunteers’ knowledge about community services which enabled them to assist members of their families and communities and friends outside the Bureau. Volunteer satisfaction surveys showed that 96% of volunteers who participated reported increased knowledge about community services and 75% reported an increased ability to help family, friends and community outside the Bureau (Frederico & Jones, 2007).

Sheppard’s (2005) research paper also showed that volunteers at the Bureau experienced higher levels of social capital due to their participation as volunteers. Social capital was defined as “the shared values and rules for social conduct ... and a common sense of ‘civic’ responsibility” (p. 5). When social capital among CALD volunteers from disadvantaged communities developed and increased, the social capital of their community also improved. Often, volunteers also became “mini agents of change” within their own communities as they share and pass on knowledge, skills and civic awareness, further enhancing the social capital of those communities. Furthermore, volunteers who left for paid employment in the community and welfare sector, through the very nature of their work would contribute in building the capacity and opportunities of local disadvantaged communities.

The formal evaluation of *Gateway* also reflected that volunteers had been channelling information about the Bureau to the community, as 52% of clients surveyed had been referred to SCAAB by volunteers (Frederico & Jones, 2007). Therefore, volunteers were able to empower disadvantaged members of their community by offering them knowledge of sources of assistance and support for their issues and concern. As SCAAB provides many different services, more holistic and integral assistance could be offered:

“As volunteers contribute to the social capital and civic awareness of their communities over time the community building aspects of the Project will be realised” (Frederico and Jones, 2007, p. 13).

Policy analysis

A program that concentrates on volunteering amongst people with a CALD background provides an important opportunity to test both the relevance of volunteering to address issues of exclusion and disadvantage, as well as contribute to a gap in knowledge about the motivations, needs and experiences of CALD communities in the volunteering experience.

The practice principles informing the Gateways Project approach are based on social capital theory and are supported through a range of international and local research literature on the connection between volunteering and social cohesion, education and employment. Gateway's premise is that, through the experience of volunteering, issues of social isolation and of social and economic disadvantage for individuals can be effectively addressed. Specifically, it is argued that for individuals from CALD communities, including recently arrived migrants and refugees, volunteering can be a pathway to employment and other forms of civic participation.

The particular approach taken in the Gateway project demonstrates that in order to achieve positive outcomes the training and support needs of such individuals must be sensitively addressed. Gateways' strategies (including: as individualised matching, and organisational culture of inclusion, a flexible and accredited training model, professional supervision and mentoring) evidence an extraordinary effort to build social capital. This is evidenced in the outcomes for individual volunteers, the service operations at SCAAB and, in the longer term, undoubtedly in the CALD communities of which the Gateways volunteers are members.

The Gateway model has evolved over the project period to become a flexible and responsive endeavour, but the project's success is also firmly rooted in an organisational culture of inclusion and promotion of learning. To some degree this means that issues of sustainability and replicability are largely untested. The short term positive outcomes of Gateways participants warrant efforts to broaden application of volunteering initiatives in other culturally and ethnically diverse communities where there are also issues of access to education and employment.

In terms of project sustainability, the outcomes for the participants and the community will endure through the skills and knowledge participants take back to the community. Learnings will be ongoing through the production of a kit for other service providers. However, given the "pathways" nature of the project and thus the turnover of participants, the project can really only be sustained if ongoing funding for the Volunteer Coordinator's position is secured. The project needs a qualified and experienced coordinator with an understanding of community development principles and skills in project management and training in order to manage the large number (over 60) volunteers who participate and move through (over 90 per year) the program. This is a full-time work load and it will be near impossible to gain a skilled volunteer to do such work for the long term which is what the project needs to succeed.

Project evaluations

The Gateways project has been evaluated by independent consultants from Latrobe University, School of Social Work and Social policy and Sirius Consulting (Frederico & Jones, 2007) commissioned by SCAAB in April 2005.

Additional investigation of the experiences of volunteers has been conducted as part of the Internship Project, Ronald Henderson Foundation, Monash University (Sheppard, 2005).

Project related publications

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More information

More information on Gateways and Promising Practice Profiles can be found on the PPP pages of the Communities and Families Clearinghouse Australia website at <http://www.aifs.gov.au/cafca/ppp/ppp.html>.



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