

An exploration of volunteer attrition in the Hunter region: Implications for volunteer sector managers

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Declaration

I hereby certify that the work embodied in this dissertation project is the result of original research and has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other university or institution.

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1 Contents

Declaration.....	ii
Acknowledgments.....	iii
Synopsis	vi
1 Introduction.....	2
1.1 Background	3
1.1.1 Benefits and Value of Volunteering	3
1.2 Research Objectives	10
1.2.1 Delimitations.....	13
2 Literature Review.....	15
2.1 Volunteering.....	16
2.1.1 Social capital.....	20
2.1.2 Trends	23
2.2 Volunteer Turnover and Attrition	24
2.2.1 Volunteer Motivations	27
2.3 Volunteer Management	29
2.4 Conclusion.....	36
3 Methodology	38
3.1 Research Design.....	40
3.1.1 Focus Groups	42
3.1.2 In-Depth Interviews	43
3.2 Research Participants	44
3.3 Research Location	48
3.4 The Research Process.....	49
3.5 Analysis.....	52
4 Results.....	55
4.1 Introduction	55

4.2	Research Question 1 – The impact and importance of volunteer attrition on the success of volunteer organisations.....	56
4.3	Research Question 2 – Who is responsible for managing volunteer programs?.....	68
4.4	Research Question 3 – Identify specific attrition management strategies employed by managers and their effectiveness.....	78
5	Discussion.....	97
5.1	Introduction.....	97
5.2	Question 1 – What is the impact of volunteer attrition on the success of volunteer organisations?	98
5.3	Question 2 – Who is responsible for managing volunteer programs?	105
5.4	Question 3 – What specific attrition management strategies are employed by managers and what is their effectiveness?	110
6	Conclusion	121
6.1	Implication for managers of volunteers	121
6.2	Implications for further research.....	124
6.2.1	Limitations.....	125
6.3	Conclusion.....	127
7	Reference List.....	II
8	Appendices.....	XII
8.1	Appendix 1 – Schedule for Focus Groups	XII
8.2	Appendix 2 – Schedule for Interviews.....	XIII

Synopsis

This project uses a qualitative research design to explore and describe how volunteer attrition is perceived and managed by volunteer sector managers in the Hunter region. The research was considered important as it addressed an identified need for more research around the retention of volunteers to avoid the interruptions in or loss of services (Haski-Leventhal & Bargal, 2008; Skoglund, 2006; Vinton, 2012). The data was collected using focus groups of volunteer managers and interviews with selected volunteer sector stakeholders. Thematic analysis was employed to identify and describe the impact of attrition of volunteers on specific not-for-profit organisations in the Hunter region, NSW, Australia. This analysis also identifies and evaluates the effectiveness of specific attrition management strategies that managers of these organisations have employed. The findings of this research is that the key to effective volunteer attrition management is a broad-based respect for the volunteers and managers of volunteers, and flexible approaches to volunteer management such as incorporating transition management techniques to handle the increase in episodic volunteers. There is a need to look beyond human resource management techniques to find solutions as attitudes toward volunteering change and individuals become more selective of the volunteering opportunities they accept. Some effective strategies that are being employed by managers of volunteers, such as treating volunteers as staff, empowering volunteers and giving authentic recognition, are important and require strong relationship skills amongst managers of volunteers.

Introduction

1 Introduction

Volunteers form the backbone of civil society and many voluntary organisations (Haski-Leventhal & Bargal, 2008). The Australian Bureau of Statistics and Volunteering Australia define volunteering as a voluntary activity that is of benefit to the community, is undertaken without coercion, and is without monetary reward (Kenny, 2008). Volunteering provides a significant economic contribution to communities (Handy & Mook, 2011) and is an important part of Australian society, with 5.2 million people providing 713 million hours voluntary hours per year (Pick, Holmes, & Brueckner, 2010 2010)(Citing ABS 2006). To put this into perspective, there are approximately 149,000 people employed in the Australian mining sector (Engineers, 2008). This ongoing contribution to Australian society in welfare, housing, social services, sport, education and the arts illustrates the importance of volunteering. Volunteer organisations can be vital conduits for assisting community problem resolution (Loza, 2004). This has been a feature of successful communities for many years. In volunteer research there has been significant attention given to the early phases of the volunteer life cycle, especially in relation to the issues of volunteer recruitment (Barnes & Sharpe, 2009). However, it appears issues related to retention and attrition of volunteers has received less attention. This observation is supported by organisations not giving volunteering the same managerial importance as paid employment (Handy & Mook, 2011). The purpose of this research is to explore and describe how volunteer attrition is perceived and managed by volunteer sector managers in the Hunter region, NSW, Australia. This thesis describes a qualitative study that was used to capture and collect rich insights into these perspectives from a sample of volunteer managers. The data was collected using focus groups of volunteer managers and interviews with selected volunteer sector stakeholders. Thematic analysis was employed to identify and describe the impact that attrition of volunteers has on

specific not-for-profit organisations in the Hunter region, NSW, Australia. Before presenting the details of this study, the following provides some background focus on the benefits and value of volunteering in society, and then explores management issues related to volunteer turnover and attrition. Effective volunteer management is a priority for the sustainability and growth of volunteering in Australia (Volunteering_Australia_Inc., 2012). Management of volunteers is different from traditional management roles as it is harder to manage the contribution of volunteers than that of paid employees (Henryks, 2011).

1.1 Background

1.1.1 Benefits and Value of Volunteering

The global history of volunteering has not been documented as well in literature as have other areas of human interaction. However, it has been part of successful community life for centuries in one form or another. Volunteers often want to be more involved in volunteer organisations and when they are volunteers, tend to provide more to the volunteer organisations they are engaged with (Yin-Che, Yun-Chi, & Jia-Mi, 2010 2010 2010). Previously, volunteer organisations had access to volunteers through their membership bases. For example, religious groups relied upon parishioners and the feeling of solidarity amongst members to undertake the work of the group. The feeling of solidarity plays an important motivating role, especially in cases of volunteering for political organisations or in response to crises (Wilson, 2012). But it is important to recognise that not everyone in a diverse community is comfortable with the same forms of community engagement (Williams, 2004). This has seen the emergence of more service community organisations that are more issue-based than traditional member based community organisations (Barnes & Sharpe, 2009). This

is where instead of groups of volunteers based around an existing institution such as a church or political party, more people with common interests about particular issues are coming together to address those issues, for example, Landcare. Volunteering reflects direct engagement in a community (Jones, 2006). It also reflects community values, such as the desire to spend time with family and friends doing something positive, either in the local community or packaged as a holiday or gap year (Morgan, 2012). These contributions include promoting social inclusion, ensuring equitably accessible high quality community services and encouraging community participation (Volunteering_Australia_Inc., 2012). This contributes to the environmental, social, cultural, and economic fabric of Australian society.

In terms of environmental issues, the volunteer effort accounts for many recent environmental improvements (Ryan, Kaplan, & Grese, 2001 2001). An example of how volunteers assist the achievement of environmental improvements can be demonstrated by the volunteers who have been trained to collect geo-tagged, digital video of mangrove shorelines and estuary banks that helps experts assess change and degradation of tidal wetlands in Queensland (McKenzie, 2011). In the Hunter region, a badly degraded wetlands in Shortland, a suburb of Newcastle, had been drained for football fields, overgrazed and used as a landfill site. It was subsequently re-naturalised and 25 years later it is the Hunter Wetlands Centre, an internationally recognised benchmark for environmental restoration. Most of the work to achieve this has been due to the commitment of local volunteers (Prietto, 2011). Community projects at Panboola on the NSW south coast have been the foundation for improved water quality in the area and volunteers are continuing to monitor biodiversity and restore the marshland (Curtis, 2011). Elsewhere, government agencies are assisted by volunteers in monitoring the status of seagrass (McKenzie, 2011). This is a small selection of

examples of countless projects throughout Australia where volunteers play a central role in improving the environment. The environment benefits from volunteers building and maintaining trails, bush regeneration, and monitoring and identifying endangered ecological communities (Ryan et al., 2001). Australian governments since the late 20th century have introduced environmental initiatives that acknowledged the importance of volunteering in addressing environmental sustainability such as the Green Army and Landcare. Volunteers can also participate in other ways such as through activism with organisations like Greenpeace, sustainable living projects such as “Transition Newcastle”, “Community Gardens”, “Living Green” and “Climate Cam” initiatives in Newcastle or through education by sharing information and raising awareness of environmental issues (Measham & Barnett, 2008). As volunteers contribute in a variety of ways to environmental issues, they also contribute to the social fabric of Australia.

Volunteers are often talked of as a solution to Australia’s social problems, and seen as essential in building and sustaining communities (Warburton & Smith, 2003). The volunteering effort impacts Australian society in a number of ways. Volunteering contributes to community inclusion by providing a sense of worth and status independent of material wealth (Nichols & Ralston, 2012). Volunteering results in volunteers moving from an experience of disadvantage to one of assisting and resourcing others. Many minority groups benefit from this phenomenon and the development of social capital through the creation of networks. Migrants typically face language barriers, cultural barriers and discrimination that limit their opportunities to make the social or professional connections essential for successful integration into the broader community (Handy & Greenspan, 2009). Volunteering has been successfully used to reduce barriers to participation in the community; examples of

this are the programs offered by the Ethnic Community Council in the Hunter region (Leong, 2008).

Volunteering is valuable for the health of communities when it brings together people for social reasons and provides an opportunity to be with one's friends (Briggs, Peterson, & Gregory, 2010 2010). This is an important role that volunteering in Australia plays which is particularly relevant in regional and rural parts of Australia (Pick et al., 2010 2011 2011) (Citing ABS 2006) This is supported by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2006 & 2010) report on voluntary work which finds that people volunteered more in regional and rural Australia than in capital cities. Declining employment opportunities and the associated loss of services leads to isolation for people living in these areas (Hede & Rentschler, 2007). The situation is exacerbated in small towns, where younger people tend to leave the area to seek employment and social opportunities, leading to feelings of loneliness and abandonment among older residents (Lee-Ack, 2008). Despite, or perhaps in response to declining employment and service issues faced by these communities, pride, cohesion and a strong sense of belonging are notable features of regional and rural communities (Lee-Ack, 2008). Why this happens is not well understood. Moreover, it has been suggested that there is a need to better understand how some communities are more resilient than others so such knowledge can be used to improve other communities (R. Stebbins, 2009).

Many Australian rural and regional communities have a stronger social fabric structured around sporting clubs and "mateship" than urban communities do (Mellor et al., 2009). Volunteering is a tool that can help people get through difficult situations by providing a social or coping outlet (Nesbit, 2011). This leads to improved outcomes for individuals involved, such as positive physical and mental health (Pillemer, Wagenet, Goldman,

Bushway, & Meador, 2009 Bushway, & Meador, 2009). This has been demonstrated by people who have been divorced or widowed who find volunteering to be an important social outlet and an opportunity to help seek meaning and companionship after being left alone (Nesbit, 2011).

The other way that volunteering has a social impact is often described as social capital. Social capital has been used to explain the value of social connections in many academic disciplines such as economics, psychology, epidemiology, sociology, and political science (Hoye & Nicholson, 2009). Social capital refers to connections and networks amongst individuals that lead to trust, reciprocity and the associated benefits (Stukas, Daly, & Cowling, 2005 2005). Volunteering increases the awareness of public needs, and helps people establish networks and relationships with charitable organisations (Wang & Graddy). Volunteer participation leads to the development of groups, trust and social networks that allows the community to pursue common interests (R. Stebbins, 2009). Strong volunteer organisations are a major factor in creating high levels of community participation and are seen as an indication of socially cohesive society providing a wide range of services via a large number of community groups that is essential for a healthy community (Leader-Elliott L, 2008). An example is that volunteering has a positive impact on the physical and mental health of volunteers (Pillemer et al., 2009). Life in communities with a high level of social capital is easier than in communities with low social capital (Preece, 2002). While volunteering is seen as an opportunity to gain learning experiences, use acquired knowledge, gain career related experience and personal development (Marcia A. Finkelstein, 2008), volunteering can also have a social impact indirectly through its cultural impact.

Volunteering creates a significant cultural impact in Australia in areas such as community arts, crafts, dance, music, theatre, visual arts and creative writing groups (Lawrence J. Bendle & Ian Patterson, 2009). The diverse cultural life of regional Australia is run almost entirely by volunteer organisations (Leader-Elliott L, 2008). Many organisations in amateur creative arts and sports provide activities, programs, training, legal protection, friendship and the cooperative ownership of assets for their members (Lawrence J. Bendle & Ian Patterson, 2009). Two examples in the Hunter region which rely heavily on volunteers include the Hunter Writers Festival, organised by volunteers, and the This Is Not Art (TINA) festival, which incorporates many micro arts festivals. Demonstration of how important volunteering is to culture in Australia is that two thirds of the work force in the cultural and leisure sectors was unpaid, while 80% of all people who work in museums are there on a volunteer basis (Leader-Elliott L, 2008). Sporting organisations had the largest number of volunteers with support from between 1.1 and 1.4 million people volunteering their, time, skills and enthusiasm (Lawrence J. Bendle & Ian Patterson, 2009) (Citing ABS 2002).

Volunteering also provides an economic benefit, helps to meet needs within the community, and develops and reinforces social networks and cohesion (McGregor-Lowndes & Edwards, 2006). Australia has relied and continues to rely heavily on volunteering as a way of delivering social outcomes through government funded programs (Byron & Curtis, 2001). Volunteering is an important resource that is not limited to delivering cultural, environmental and social impact but has an important, tangible economic impact (Handy & Mook, 2011; Volunteering_Australia_Inc., 2012). Nevertheless, volunteerism is an often overlooked contributor to the Australian national economy. Conservative estimates puts the economic contribution of the volunteering effort in Australia at more than \$200 billion — a contribution

that is greater in economic terms than that of the mining sector (Rogers & Noble, 2013). As a consequence, there are misconceptions that volunteers are a cost saving or free labour and that the value of volunteer effort is best measured by the hours contributed and dollars saved rather than a human resource which needs to be professionally managed, protected and cultivated (Handy & Mook, 2011; Volunteering_Australia_Inc., 2012). Volunteering also impacts other sectors of the economy; for example, it sends positive signals in the labour market (Handy & Mook, 2011).

The political impact of volunteering in Australia can be seen through the National Standards (Government, 2011) and the NSW Volunteering Strategy (Communities, 2013). Volunteer organisations provide many of the services previously the domain of government (Pick et al., 2010). Governments are increasing efforts to promote volunteering, yet they are also driving to increase professionalism and change in policies and regulatory procedures that may be actively discouraging volunteering (Milligan & Fyfe, 2005). Negative perceptions that volunteering suffers as a result of the sometimes conflicting objectives of governments, organisations and volunteers make it more difficult to recruit and retain volunteers (Haski-Leventhal & Meijs, 2011). As governments increasingly demonstrate their reluctance to deal with society's perceived ills, the more crucial volunteers become to bridging this gap (Warburton & Smith, 2003). Volunteer labour has always been insufficient to meet demand for the services it has been asked to deliver (Wilson & Musick, 1997). This has created concerns about the sustainability of volunteer groups in a period of increased demand (Byron & Curtis, 2001). Mandated volunteering has been introduced at various times in Australia with mixed response. There is a perception that mutual obligation, such as work for the dole introduced in early 2000's, had a negative impact on volunteering (Leong, 2008). This suggests that imposing requirements to volunteer may reduce interest in volunteer activities

by altering individuals' perceptions of why they help (Stukas, Snyder, & Clary, 1999). There are some interesting themes around the strategies used to manage turnover and attrition of volunteers, who is asked to manage the challenge, the impact and importance it has on the success of volunteer organisations, and how it affects the value and benefits volunteering provides the community in the Hunter region, NSW Australia.

1.2 Research Objectives

It has been identified that there is a lack of knowledge relating to the management of attrition amongst volunteers (Vinton, 2012). This research will be used to better comprehend the nature and impact of the problem that volunteer attrition is having (Sekaran & Bougie, 2009). Most volunteer research is conducted from the point of view of the volunteers. This research will contribute to the knowledge by looking at the issue from the perspective of volunteer managers. It will help to assess the scope of impact that attrition represents for volunteer organisations. This should allow managers of volunteers, organisations and policy makers to make more informed decisions, as well as provide direction and opportunities for future research and investigation into volunteer management. To this end, the research objectives for this study are:

1. *To explore the impact and importance the issue that volunteer attrition has on the success of volunteer organisations in the Hunter region.*

Evidence in the literature implies that the support an organisation provides to its volunteers and ongoing socialisation of volunteers is a key factor in a volunteer's motivation to continue to volunteer (Haski-Leventhal & Bargal, 2008). Trust is important not only to attract clients

and customers to the organisation's services but also to attract funding, philanthropy and volunteers. The literature also suggests that the quality of volunteer management plays a significant role in the reason why volunteers either choose to stay or choose to leave their volunteer roles (Lawrence J. Bendle & Ian Patterson, 2009). This concept could be extended beyond the scope of volunteer management to all paid employees. There is a perception, rightly or wrongly, that some people who fill important roles within volunteer organisations view volunteers as free labour and look down on or mistrust volunteers. A negative workplace attitude towards volunteers has an impact on volunteer attrition so it is important to understand what these attitudes are in the Hunter region and the impact they have on the success of volunteer management.

2. *To identify who is responsible for volunteer management and what skills they need to effectively manage volunteer attrition.*

While it is widely accepted that the relationship a manager of volunteers has with the volunteers is critical to the success of a volunteer organisation, it appears that little is known about what volunteer managers do to leverage this relationship (Bruyere & Rappe, 2007). Managers of volunteers are required to have a broad range of skills, from marketing to counselling to project management to human resource management, in order to successfully meet all the demands made on such a position. In addition, volunteer management is often conducted in a resource-constrained environment and as a result those constraints play a significant part in which management strategies are adopted. It is important to understand, if these restraints were to be altered, what approach managers of volunteers would take.

3. *To identify specific attrition management strategies employed by managers in the Hunter region and evaluate their effectiveness.*

The challenge of volunteer attrition includes volunteer burnout, volunteer commitment, turnover of volunteers and the perception of an ageing volunteer workforce. Management issues, such as bureaucracy, are contributing to the attrition of volunteers and therefore the effectiveness of volunteer programs (Byron & Curtis, 2001). This is an important problem to address as the volunteer effort is critical to providing social programs, products and services that would otherwise be unavailable to the community (Handy, Mook, & Quarter, 2006 2006; Haski-Leventhal & Cnaan, 2009). Being able to reliably deliver their services has a significant impact on the sustainability of an organisation. When volunteers are socialised into their roles, they often face ambiguity in what they are required to do (Haski-Leventhal & Bargal, 2008). It can be inferred from this that volunteer management suffers this same ambiguity, possibly more so due to the diverse nature of volunteering. As a result it is anticipated that as there is no agreed profile for what makes a good manager of volunteers, what makes a program successful, whether there will be a wide range of ideas for how the challenge of attrition should be managed, or what success in mitigating attrition will look like. Deducing common themes most valued by managers of volunteers when dealing with the challenge of volunteer attrition may provide some insight into what successful volunteer attrition management is.

These questions have the objective of informing the development of strategies, future research and policies designed to reduce attrition, which can be applied at an organisational or regional level. This is needed because sometimes despite best intentions, the management support offered to assist volunteering efforts is ineffective or counterproductive (Lawrence J. Bendle & Ian. Patterson, 2009). Understanding, the type and style of support would be very useful.

1.2.1 Delimitations

This project uses a qualitative research design to explore and describe how volunteer attrition is perceived and managed by volunteer sector managers in the Hunter region. The data was collected using focus groups of managers of volunteers and interviews with selected volunteer sector stakeholders. Thematic analysis was employed to identify and describe the impact that volunteer attrition has on specific not-for-profit organisations in the Hunter region. This analysis also identifies and evaluates the effectiveness of specific attrition management strategies that managers of these organisations have employed. This research will not address a volunteer's perspective of volunteer attrition, or the nature and the impact it has on volunteer attrition. This is because volunteers who have left a volunteer group do not experience the impact that is left behind and those who are still volunteering are not thinking about why they would not volunteer. This research could be done across a broader population throughout Australia with Volunteering Australia or throughout Australasia with the Australasian Association for Managers of Volunteers. In this case, the study was limited to the Hunter region due to the time and financial constraints of the researcher. Nevertheless, it is believed that research conducted in the Hunter region would demonstrate key themes that could form the basis of a larger research study.

Literature Review

2 Literature Review

Over the years there has been a rich history of research into volunteering. This research has been conducted in many different disciplines including management, psychology, education and health. It has focused on the recruitment, motivations and value of volunteering. While some of the research has touched on retention and attrition of volunteers, it has primarily focused on recruitment, motivations or the value of volunteering to volunteers, organisations, economy, stakeholders and the civil society. There can be an over-reliance on quantitative research in the volunteer research space which misses out on the importance of intangible aspects such as increased social capital, social networks, and other successful outcomes for volunteer organisations (Schneider, Ehrhart, & MacEy, 2013). Much of the research that has been done previously involves qualitative surveys of volunteers, however it is believed that volunteer research techniques should reflect the diversity of the volunteering community.

This section presents a review of literature available in the area of volunteer attrition management. This will be presented as general volunteer literature: literature specifically focused on volunteer management and on motivations to volunteer as a form of social capital. The literature provides a theoretical basis for the thematic analysis of the research data as discussed in the methodology section. It also informs the discussion of the results presented in the research. This is important for understanding the data collected in order to provide a broader view of the research problem in the context of volunteering, volunteer management and social capital. Firstly, this section will investigate general volunteering literature.

2.1 Volunteering

This study assumes that the Hunter region has no obvious differentiation from the definition of volunteering in the broader Australian context. Volunteering Australia defines formal volunteering as an activity taking place through non-profit organisations or projects. Volunteering is to be of benefit to the community and the volunteer, of the volunteer's own free will, without coercion, for no financial payment and in designated volunteer positions only (Volunteering_Australia_Inc., 2015). It is important for managers of volunteers to understand that volunteers choose to provide services and that they are under no obligation to do so (Vecina, 2012). Across a variety of sectors in our community, including sports, healthcare and the environment, there are many different types of volunteering activities such as corporate volunteering, tourism volunteering, informal volunteering and event or one-off volunteering (Tomazos & Butler, 2009). Volunteering is a global phenomenon (Dover, 2010); people of all ages are encouraged to volunteer because it can have many positive outcomes for those who participate. The nature of how people engage in volunteering appears to be changing how and where they volunteer, raising concerns about the collapse of communities unable to maintain volunteer services upon which they relied heavily in the past (Bekkers, 2007). As a response to an ever increasingly complex and restrictive environment, these concerns have attracted increasing academic interest in recent years (Oppenheimer, 2008; Warburton & Cordingley, 2004; Warren, 2014). This complexity is made more difficult for researchers because of the need to navigate many disciplines which aim to extend our understanding of volunteering (D. H. Smith, 1994). This interest has uncovered that people can perform the same type of volunteering activity but for different reasons (Dolnicar & Randle, 2007). It has also highlighted that volunteering is not restricted to one sector of the economy; it also occurs in many different sectors of the economy, including business and government sectors (DeLaat, 1987). As a consequence of the complexity and restrictive

environment that volunteer work involves, a certain degree of planning and commitment is required from a volunteer which does not lead to the material benefits that normally result from paid work (Mellor et al., 2009). However, it is crucial to remember that the most important resource volunteer organisations have is volunteers (Chinman & Wandersman, 1999).

Volunteering can be motivated by a broader appeal, such as the feeling of making a difference to the world, improving social networks and creating a sense of place (Measham & Barnett, 2008). What motivates volunteers can be complicated by mutual obligation requirements imposed by the Australian government requiring people to volunteer but these policy decisions have not been fully explored (Levy, 2006). Substantial literature has found a positive relationship between undertaking volunteer activity amongst older people and increased physical activity and improvements in cognitive functioning (Pillemer, Wagenet, Goldman, Bushway, & Meador, 2009; Bushway, & Meador, 2009). In contrast, younger volunteers often get interested in volunteering as an opportunity to gain career-related experience, apply acquired knowledge, or achieve personal development (M. A. Finkelstein, 2008). It is important to understand that volunteer motivations change over time and the reason that motivated them to begin volunteering is not always what motivates them to continue volunteering (Measham & Barnett, 2008). For volunteer organisations, volunteer participation provides more resources to help them achieve their goals (Chinman & Wandersman, 1999).

The volunteer effort is shown to benefit the whole community (Bekkers, 2007); however, to achieve these benefits, volunteer organisations need to continually replenish their supply of

resources (i.e., volunteers) to remain viable (Chinman & Wandersman, 1999). This means volunteer organisations need to develop sustainable volunteering experiences. The ability to do this is effected by many different factors; for example, if a volunteer needs to leave in order to work in the paid labour market, the less time they have available for volunteering (Apinunmahakul, Barham, & Devlin, 2009). This is a major issue as the perception is, at least in countries like Australia, that people are trying to do more things in the same amount of time (Barnes & Sharpe, 2009). Volunteer organisations are also faced with volunteers varying levels of skills, knowledge and commitment, which can have an impact on achieving their organisational goals and retaining volunteers (Farmer & Fedor, 2001).

There is no easy answer to why people choose to volunteer their time, or want to help a volunteer organisation achieve its goals but some of the more popular reasons are to help others, personal satisfaction, and social contact (Holmes, 2009). There are several reasons why people choose to volunteer that includes doing it as leisure, that the place means something to them, that they like the type of organisation or it is close to where they live or work. Many volunteers look for volunteering programs that use their time most efficiently (Bruyere & Rappe, 2007); with today's busy lifestyles, people aren't willing to invest their time and effort if it is not going to achieve something they value. Other reasons people choose a particular place to volunteer is because it is important to those who encouraged them to volunteer. This is a form of social inclusion that is important to encourage (Marcia A. Finkelstein). An emerging factor for where people choose to participate in volunteering is in the tourism sector. This is demonstrated by volunteer organisations that offer diverse volunteer experiences, such as helping to build a school, particularly those packaged with a holiday, or recreational and social activities (Tomazos & Butler, 2009). From an employer's

perspective, offering work–life balance in conjunction with a supportive supervisor and an organisational culture that encourages community participation reduces attrition amongst employees (O’Neill et al., 2009), and is important to reducing attrition amongst volunteers when there is no remuneration penalty for leaving, or requirement to give notice (Leonard, Onyx, & Hayward-Brown, 2004). It is important for managers or supervisors to understand that they can influence those around them; their attitudes and stress can filter throughout an organisation via open networks and this will have an effect on attrition (O’Neill et al., 2009). So it is important for leaders in volunteer organisations to be supportive of staff and volunteers using work-life benefits offered for them to be effective at increasing commitment and reducing attrition.

The literature demonstrates that volunteering is not free for the volunteer or the organisation. Volunteering incurs monetary costs for a volunteer such as travel, parking, membership, training, opportunity and time costs, also there are operational costs for an organisation such as supplies, equipment and uniform costs associated with volunteering which are all larger when a volunteer firsts begins volunteering with an organisation (Farrell, Johnston, & Twynam, 1998; Holmes, 2009). It’s important to identify the indirect outcomes of attrition because volunteering does have a financial cost for both the organisation and the volunteer (Farrell, Johnston, & Twynam, 1998). The outcomes of the attrition of volunteers can have an effect, not only on the costs bore by the organisation, but the levels of charitable giving they receive. The literature shows that the more someone volunteers the more they are likely to give financially (Brown & Ferris, 2007; Wang & Graddy, 2008). This means having a sustainable volunteer workforce over a longer period of time is beneficial to both the volunteer and the organisation. Environmental volunteerism is a growing segment of the volunteering community because in fulfils several of the needs and values for the people who

participate in the voluntary activity. Helping the environment and enhancing the natural world is a major motivating factor for people who value the natural environment (Bruyere & Rappe, 2007) as evidenced by the popularity of eco-tourism that has become moral, sensitive, exclusive and fashionable (Tomazos & Butler, 2009). This trend also reflect other research which shows that as members of the community, many residents reported feeling some level of responsibility towards environmental and community issues in their area (Miller & Buys, 2008). Learning is another key motivator for people interested in environmental volunteerism (Bruyere & Rappe, 2007), people find it interesting to learn about flora, fauna and key environmental issues facing society such as climate change and global warming. Shared values and increasing esteem is another motivation, as participation helps people feel good about themselves (Bruyere & Rappe, 2007), and another aspect of social capital that holds communities together (Miller & Buys, 2008). They also feel an obligation to help manage an environmental estate because they enjoy using it and meet other social needs of the individual such as meeting new people and doing something positive with their mates and family (Miller & Buys, 2008). There are many reasons why volunteer organisations need to offer various types of benefits (social or material) to retain volunteers after an initial project that attracted volunteers to the organisation is completed or they need to start new projects to encourage those volunteers to continue working with them (Chinman & Wandersman, 1999).

2.1.1 Social capital

A significant body of information has been developed that considers volunteering as a form of social capital. This literature provides some insights into motivational factors associated with developing social capital that drives people to engage in volunteering and may provide some insight as to why volunteers attrite. This literature is reviewed here.

Volunteering leads to the development of groups, trust and social networks that allows a community to pursue common interests (R. Stebbins, 2009). A common way of describing this is through the concept of social capital. The idea behind social capital is that social networks have a value (Hoye & Nicholson, 2009). Volunteering can generate social capital for a variety of reasons, for example Landcare gives participants the feeling that they are making a difference to the world, brings people together to achieve common goals, creates improved social networks and develops a sense of place (Kai-Ping, Chiyang James, & Chui-Fen, 2009 2009; Measham & Barnett, 2008). Volunteering increases the awareness of public needs and helps people establish networks and relationships with charitable organisations (Wang & Graddy, 2008). Volunteer satisfaction is an important component to understand social capital because if a volunteer is satisfied, they are more likely to believe their community is responsible, safe and that they can trust people, whereas if volunteers are unsatisfied the community cannot count on people to help those in need (Stukas, Daly, & Cowling, 2005). Both communities and organisations value their gains in effectiveness and the opportunities to build trust and reciprocity that is created by these social interactions and networks.

Understanding the benefits of social capital, helps us to put into context why communities value volunteering. Definitions for what social capital is are varied and have been used to mean different things (Wang & Graddy, 2008). The underlying ideas go back many years to the times of Aristotle (E. Hartman, 2011). Social capital works by making participation appealing and not participating unappealing (Miller & Buys, 2008). It is difficult to measure social capital because it can't be directly observed. (Brown & Ferris, 2007), and social capital

can be individual, organisational, community or group based (Hongseok, Labianca, & Myung-Ho, 2006). There are some common ideas behind social capital that refer to relationships, networks, norms and trust (Hayami, 2009). Social capital generate resources that can facilitate actions, outcomes, goodwill, reciprocity, opportunities, economic benefits, political benefits and improve effectiveness of the individual, organisation, community, or group (Birch & Whittam, 2008; Hongseok et al., 2006; Hoyer & Nicholson, 2009; Kai-Ping et al., 2009; Lee, 2009). This suggests that life in communities with a high level of social capital is easier than in communities with a low level of social capital (Preece, 2002). It's important to understand that social networks are not the outcome, but rather the conduit for a range of other positive outcomes such as emotional and physical support in times of need (Hoyer & Nicholson, 2009). As a result, these positive outcomes have attracted the attention of the political community.

Volunteers have the power to influence the achievement of organisational outcomes therefore it is important to develop communication with volunteers and senior managers (Foster & Jonker, 2005). Social capital is a key factor in managing innovation, turnover and intellectual capital for an organisation (Troshani & Doolin, 2007). This means that there is interdependence between social capital creation and the volunteer organisation that is important for positive community outcomes. Social capital is not permanent and must be maintained to retain its value. This is demonstrated through the lack of organisational maturity in organisations that rely on volunteers, due to transient nature of knowledge (Hume & Hume, 2008). Thus to reducing the rate of volunteer attrition is essential to maintaining the social capital of a community. Volunteers are motivated to build social capital by meeting new people and making friends (Measham & Barnett, 2008), and these social networks play a

vital role in communication of innovation, knowledge and learning for an organisation (Troshani & Doolin, 2007). Meeting volunteer expectations is the key to developing strong social capital between the individual and the community (Omoto & Snyder, 2002). From a community point of view the total benefits of volunteering could exceed the sum of its parts (Handy & Mook, 2011). The benefits of a strong volunteer workforce to the community are clear but as our communities evolve so does the availability of volunteers and how they choose to volunteer.

2.1.2 Trends

What maintains a sustainable volunteer workforce has changed over time. Companies are becoming more aware of corporate social responsibility, which is leading to an increase in corporate volunteering (Cavallaro, 2006). The Australian government has also rolled out a program of mutual obligation for job seekers to volunteer in order to address issues of learned helplessness and mitigate the effects that unemployment has on the unemployed (Levy, 2006). The increase in short-term, or episodic, volunteering is also having a profound effect on what it means to be a volunteer (R. Stebbins, 2009). Young volunteers perceive volunteering very differently to their predecessors. They see it as an activity which they have the option to accept or reject on their own terms (Stebbins, 1996). This means that volunteers are now fitting volunteering around their lives not their lives around volunteering, thus volunteering organisations are increasingly struggling to retain and rely on volunteers (Hustinx, 2010b). This is creating challenges for volunteer managers particularly around the attrition of volunteers. The idea of organising volunteering around a person's time and not the activity has seen the rise of innovative programs designed to meet these challenges. For example, the NSW government launched a pilot program in 2012 in the Hunter region called Timebanking (Communities, 2013). Timebanking provides the framework to build

connections and networks that build communities and encourages reciprocity (Kimmel, 2009). This has seen a debate develop around the definition of volunteering with Volunteering Australia's definition currently under review (Volunteering_Australia_Inc., 2015).

2.2 Volunteer Turnover and Attrition

Volunteering is changing from habitual and dedicated volunteering associated with traditional volunteering practices towards a more episodic, short-term commitment (Hustinx, 2010b). This creates several challenges for volunteering organisations and managers of volunteers. In a Spanish study of volunteer intentions to quit volunteering in social and ecological organisations, one of the biggest challenges faced by voluntary sector managers is the high turnover rate of volunteers (Hidalgo, 2009). Volunteering requires considerable organisational support and management (Weston, Fendley, Jewell, Satchell, & Tzaros, 2003 Satchell, & Tzaros, 2003 Satchell, & Tzaros, 2003). The freedom volunteers have to leave a position and refuse to do particular tasks or work at particular times only adds to create unique challenges for volunteer leaders and managers (Leonard, Onyx, & Hayward-Brown, 2004 2004 2004). Very few people who register to volunteer continue to volunteer after a year, with an average length of time people volunteer being only 18 months (Hidalgo, 2009). This demonstrates that managers of volunteers do not have the control that is typically espoused in management theories aimed at managers of paid labour (Leonard et al., 2004). This is further exacerbated by the fact that the supply of volunteer labour is often insufficient to meet the growing demand for volunteers (Wilson & Musick, 1997). As a result, volunteers can be picky and capricious about where they volunteer, leading to relatively high turnover

among volunteer labour searching for roles that best suit their needs (Omoto & Snyder, 2002). This creates a dynamic and fluid volunteer workforce placing greater pressures on managers of volunteers.

The mobility of volunteers is a challenging issue for many volunteer organisations (Ward & McKillop, 2011), and is associated with broader volunteer resource management issues, such as recruitment and retaining volunteers (Cuskelly, Taylor, Hoye, & Darcy, 2006 & Darcy, 2006). Borrowing from human resource theory, Volunteer mobility can be broken down into attrition, where a volunteer stops volunteering, and turnover, where a volunteer leaves to volunteer elsewhere (R. N. S. Robinson & Barron, 2007). This distinction is not always made in the literature, with many disciplines interpreting the terms turnover and attrition slightly differently and often using them interchangeably (Warnick, Gonzalez, Robin Weersing, Scahill, & Woolston, 2012; Yang, Wan, & Fu, 2012). What effort is needed to address attrition is not known because the impact of attrition can be difficult to ascertain, with good records of volunteer attrition rarely being kept (Cuskelly et al., 2006). In volunteering organisations, identifying the reasons for volunteer attrition is often ignored or treated as a low priority (Nkonki, Cliff, & Sanders, 2011 2011 2011) as the realities of day to day operational management of volunteer projects dominate. Because of this lack of knowledge, volunteers' reasons for leaving an organisation are often believed to be administratively uncontrollable (Claxton-Oldfield & Claxton-Oldfield, 2008). Nevertheless, it is an issue because having a high attrition rate is associated with poor productivity (Adhikari, 2009). Loyal, regular, satisfied volunteers often result in a positive influence on recruitment and the delivery of services, whilst dissatisfied volunteers can adversely affect an organisation (Yin-Che et al., 2010).

The literature also tells us that retaining employees can hold down costs and this is no different for volunteer organisations (Vinton, 2012). Volunteering generates costs for both the volunteer and the organisation (Holmes, Smith, Lockstone-Binney, & Baum, 2010 & Baum, 2010 & Baum, 2010) and also requires considerable organisational support (Weston et al., 2003 2003) to manage the costs of recruitment, training and supervision of volunteers (Govekar & Govekar, 2002). This is supported in human resource management theories and research in that it suggests that a high turnover of employees leads to increased recruitment, training and supervision costs as well as negative impact on motivation (R. N. S. Robinson & Barron, 2007; Yang et al., 2012). There are also increased time costs for new volunteers that will usually be higher in the first year, suggesting that reducing attrition will reduce time costs associated with volunteer management (Holmes, 2009). There are limits, such as resources, on the ability of volunteer organisations to utilise volunteers (Govekar & Govekar, 2002). For volunteer organisations, the search for quality volunteers becomes more crucial and costly; therefore, keeping volunteers longer have many positive benefits for the sustainability of volunteering organisations.

The key role of interpreting the needs of the organisation and volunteers and operationalising them is conducted by managers of volunteers (Dover, 2010). Notwithstanding, recognition that volunteer management is complex and challenging and requires a unique sets of skills and strategies (Dover, 2010) is not something that is regularly addressed in research, particularly in relation to the attrition of volunteers. However, while some research exists into volunteer perspectives there is very little research that examines attrition management in volunteer organisations from the perspective of the managers of volunteers. This presents a

gap in our understanding of management approaches to retaining volunteers. Specifically, little research has examined the challenges that face managers of volunteers as they attempt to sustain volunteer engagement (Henryks, 2011).

Recruiting and retaining volunteers are the most difficult and time-consuming tasks faced by volunteer organisations (Phillips, 2010). Volunteers who want to be involved in volunteer organisations tend to provide more time and effort to volunteer organisations with which they are highly engaged (Yin-Che et al., 2010). The ability of a volunteer organisation to attract and retain volunteers can be enhanced by providing flexibility towards and highly visible appreciation of volunteer participation, which is appreciated by volunteers whose commitment to volunteering will change throughout their volunteering career (D. B. Smith, 2004). This requires a strategic approach by organisations to the recruitment and retention of volunteers (Phillips, 2010). Many volunteer organisations would perform better if they targeted their volunteer recruitment strategies to the particular needs of a volunteer role (Yin-Che et al., 2010). However, organisations must do more than recruit; they must maximise volunteer involvement in the organisation (Marta, Pozzi, & Marzana, 2010 2010). Both formal and informal training and education of volunteers is an effective tool not only for purposes of recruitment but also reduces the attrition rate of volunteers (Yin-Che et al., 2010).

2.2.1 Volunteer Motivations

Factors that lead to higher contributions by volunteers include volunteer workplace relationships, expectations and experience (Farmer & Fedor, 2001). People choose to perform the same type of volunteering activity for different reasons (Dolnicar & Randle, 2007). They

can have different motivations for continuing volunteering, such as being personally empowered, or the activity gives them the opportunity to develop skills and confidence (Gooch, 2004). Volunteers also have different motivations again for stopping volunteering.

Volunteer recruitment is not only a human resource issue, it is a marketing issue in that many volunteers structure their participation as leisure time, not work, thus there is a need to understand what motivates volunteers to begin volunteering and satisfying their expectations once they are there ("More than Motivation: Reconsidering Volunteer Management Tools," 2011). The concept of volunteering for leisure is very similar to that of participating in unpaid work in that it should be un-coerced, in which volunteers use their skills and resource in a satisfying way during their free time (R. Stebbins, 2013). With this in mind, engaging with volunteers and adjusting training and social needs with the diverse and changing needs and demands of the volunteer community would assist in reducing the attrition of volunteers (Yin-Che et al., 2010).

The challenge of volunteer attrition may not be about changing volunteer motivations but rather, how they are managed (Barnes & Sharpe, 2009). To avoid the attrition of volunteers it is important that there be some common ground between the managers of volunteers and the volunteers' attitudes to their management (Leonard et al., 2004). The manager plays a crucial role not only in recruiting volunteers but also in retaining volunteers (Brudney & Williamson, 2000; Warner, Newland, & Green, 2011 2011 2011). Volunteering is pervasive throughout Australian society; examples of event-based volunteering such as the Sydney Olympic Games and Melbourne Commonwealth Games demonstrate this. Increased understanding of the perspectives of managers of volunteers will provide a better understanding of how to address attrition of volunteers of not-for-profit organisations in the Hunter region. As a

consequence, this research will demonstrate ways to address and manage attrition, identify successful mitigation techniques and evaluate whether they are transferable across volunteer organisations. The exploration of volunteer attrition highlights a management problem that is faced by managers of volunteers across volunteer organisations.

2.3 Volunteer Management

Volunteer management is an emerging field that while similar to other management disciplines can be very different indeed. Managing volunteer labour is equally important to an organisation that engages volunteers as managing any other human resource (Handy & Mook, 2011). Good volunteer management benefits the community through successful volunteer programs and the prevention of the waste of the volunteer effort (Handy et al., 2006). Being able to manage the challenge of volunteer attrition is critical to the success of volunteer organisations (J. Garner & L. Garner, 2011). Professional volunteer management has become an important capacity for volunteering organisations with additional legal requirements and the increased prevalence of competitive funding practices (Healy, Lyons-Crew, Michaux, & Gal, 2008). Offering a volunteer program requires considerable organisational support, and that support is likely to come from a paid staff rather than from volunteers (Weston, Fendley, Jewell, Satchell, & Tzaros, 2003 Satchell, & Tzaros, 2003). The role of managing volunteers is often added to the workload of a staff member within a non-profit organisation while some larger organisations may have a designated manager of volunteers (MacDuff, Netting, & O'Connor, 2009). This means that the management of both the paid employee and unpaid volunteer can on the surface appear similar (Shin & Kleiner, 2003). This results in the hierarchical management structure that is often found in volunteer organisations (Kenny, 2008), and includes planning, developing, recruiting, training and information management as well as the need to recognise or appreciate volunteers (Shin &

Kleiner, 2003). However, formalisation and standardisation of structures in volunteering activities reduces volunteer autonomy and as a result reduces their commitment to an organisation (Ganesh & McAllum, 2012). These hierarchical structures may not be the best way to manage volunteers; adopting traditional management techniques, with emphasis on things such as efficiency, can be negatively perceived by volunteers and can lead to a decline in their willingness to volunteer (Leonard et al., 2004). Volunteers nevertheless recognise that good management of volunteers is essential in dealing with the challenges of maintaining an ongoing volunteer program (Henryks, 2011). Whether they see it as work or leisure, when they volunteer, people expect the activity to be well organised (Paull, 2009). The challenge of volunteer management has been linked to the changing motivations of volunteers, especially in relation to the social capital it develops (as discussed later in this section), how volunteers are being managed, and is often overlooked by volunteer organisations (Barnes & Sharpe, 2009). There is a strong belief amongst volunteers that they should not be ordered around (Leonard et al., 2004), with many volunteers not citing division between management and volunteers or lack of voice as reasons they stop volunteering (Hustinx, 2010a). Nevertheless, incorporating some formal human resource management practices, particularly around safety, can lead to better volunteer management outcomes with fewer problems in the retention of volunteers (Cuskelly, Taylor, Hoye, & Darcy, 2006). As a result of these different challenges, there appears to be a significant difference between volunteer management and traditional human resource management. This has seen the rise of different schools of thought and approaches to volunteer management. While traditional thinking has human resources as the background to volunteer management, some literature suggests that volunteer management is more related to the consumer experience and satisfaction demonstrated in marketing theories (Randle, 2012).

Effective volunteer management ensures that the quality and reliability of the programs and services offered by volunteer organisations are not negatively impacted by volunteers who are not satisfied with their experience (Cuskelly et al., 2006). Having the capacity to recruit, manage and retain volunteers may be the difference between an organisation failing or its programs becoming a sustainable part of the community (MacDuff et al., 2009). This is because effective management of volunteers is essential to dealing with the challenges of maintaining an ongoing volunteer program (Henryks, 2011), which is why effective volunteer programs are often associated with good management of these programs (Vinton, 2012). Often, while volunteer management is carried out by people who are enthusiasts for the sport, mission or values of the organisation and are often focused on participation rather than human resource management (Simkus, Fominiene, & Ivanova, 2014), it has also emerged that volunteers are often reluctant to participate in the administration tasks of an organisation, creating gaps in volunteer programs that are usually filled by implementing volunteer management systems (Wolcott, 2008). Having these volunteer management systems in place can stimulate volunteer programs and allow them to meet organisational needs (Vinton, 2012). These systems can enhance the sustainability of the volunteer workforce by increasing recruitment, improving retention and decreasing attrition amongst volunteers (Wolcott, 2008). Allowing managers of volunteers to provide knowledge and build competencies in the volunteer community will improve the confidence of volunteers and increase the contribution which they make (Healy et al., 2008). It also increases the perception amongst volunteers that there is strong organisational support for their work and that the organisation values their contribution. This in turn increases volunteers' respect for the organisation (Garner & Garner, 2011). The need for these sophisticated management systems means that the role of the manager of volunteers is crucial for the sustainability of volunteer programs (Brudney & Williamson, 2000). The role of the manager of volunteers is complicated by the diverse

nature of volunteering organisations (Waters & Bortree, 2012). They need to be flexible, good communicators and appreciate the different roles, relationships and contexts of staff and volunteers situations and positions (Rawlings, 2012). Volunteer management differs from human resource management because unlike paid employees, volunteers give their time and energy at their cost, and as a result they need to be managed differently to employees (Shin & Kleiner, 2003).

The freedom a volunteer has to leave a position without suffering a financial loss is the most significant difference between their management and the management of paid staff (Leonard et al., 2004). However it is not the only difference; volunteers have different attitudes. In particular, the motivations and the value of working for the organisation for volunteers is different to that of paid staff (Haski-Leventhal & Bargal, 2008). This raises a range of additional management issues such as volunteer's preference to set their own work schedule and therefore be less likely to be retained by organisations whose rules were perceived as excessively rigid (Leonard et al., 2004). Manager of volunteers are challenged by differing expectations and the preferences of stakeholders concerning how they manage their volunteers and this may vary in relation to the level of training and experience of the volunteers which, in turn, may be influenced by volunteers' knowledge, duration of engagement and perception of the organisation's culture (Cuskelly et al., 2006). This diversity within volunteer ranks has prompted some people to suggest that the role of the manager of volunteers should just create a framework that allows community members to choose to participate, and to not formally manage volunteers (Kenny, 2008). Regardless of whether the manager of volunteers is formally managing volunteers or working within a framework, they must create an environment of support for volunteers (Shin & Kleiner,

2003). From the perspective of a manager of volunteers, it is important to understand the motivations of people who volunteer, methods to recruit volunteers, and ways to reduce the attrition of volunteers (Kenny, 2008). To do this, a manager of volunteers must be able to relate to volunteers on a personal level whilst still maintaining professionalism (Shin & Kleiner, 2003). Traditional volunteer management techniques apply, whether managing volunteers online or on-site (Dhebar & Stokes, 2008). These challenges demonstrate a need to further develop an awareness by senior managers within organisations of the different challenges of volunteer management as the means of improving volunteer management (Choudhury, 2010).

It is essential that the manager of volunteers not only understand the organisational requirements for volunteers but also the broader patterns of volunteering engagement (Shin & Kleiner, 2003). For a manager of volunteers, focusing on the same metrics as a manager of paid staff such as attempting to control volunteers with strict adherence to policy and procedures, appears to conflict with the volunteers' perception of their work (Leonard et al., 2004). Similarly to implementing human resource management to paid employment, there is no agreement at what the most significant management practices are for community organisations (Simkus et al., 2014). This is why formalised human resource management practices may not always fit with the management of volunteers (Cuskelly et al., 2006), which is why volunteer management is different to human resource management (Simkus et al., 2014). To avoid the attrition of volunteers, it is important that there be some common ground between the manager of volunteers and the volunteers' attitudes to their management (Leonard et al., 2004). By using the organisation's mission statement, the manager of volunteers can begin to identify, develop and implement strategies for the effective utilisation of volunteers (Shin & Kleiner, 2003). This, however, can be complicated by the need to

consider multiple stakeholders such as clients, workers, government and other funding bodies, all with an interest in volunteers' work (Leonard et al., 2004). This is why a one-size-fits-all approach is inappropriate in volunteer management (Hustinx & Handy, 2009). Managers of volunteers must be able to demonstrate leadership to address the challenge of multiple stakeholders (Shin & Kleiner, 2003). To do this, they must satisfy volunteer expectations but they also must also address specific aspects of organising volunteers including communication and volunteer recognition (Farrell et al., 1998). Much of the discussion of volunteer management tends to focus on volunteer motivation and satisfaction issues (Cuskelly et al., 2006). However volunteer management involves more than that; it creates a valued experience for the volunteer which means volunteer management is about encouraging volunteers, being good communicator, being supportive, knowledgeable, understanding, enthusiastic, practicing empathy, providing feedback and having social skills (Shin & Kleiner, 2003). These skills are needed to maintain an ongoing sustainable volunteering program.

As the environment in which volunteer organisations operate becomes more competitive and more complex (Healy et al., 2008), organisations must develop plans on how to effectively manage volunteers (Shin & Kleiner, 2003). Unfortunately, the volunteer management role is not often well defined in organisations that offer volunteer programs. This is because a significant number of paid manager of volunteers do not have training in volunteer management (Handy & Mook, 2011). Adequate funding for volunteer management is elusive (Volunteering_Australia_Inc., 2012). This is possibly the result of a popular myth adopted by many organisations that see volunteers as “free labour” and hence do not accord them the same managerial importance as other resources (Handy & Mook, 2011). It is not the only

issue facing effective volunteer management; there are often difficulties between paid employees and volunteers (Nisbet, 2007). This is because realities of day to day operational management of volunteer projects dominate. Being able to offer managers of volunteers continuous training in effective management skills is important to further developing strong plans to manage volunteers (Shin & Kleiner, 2003).

When developing sustainable volunteering programs, organisations need access to quality research to inform their volunteer management practices. Thus, effective management of the volunteer resource is an area in need of further investigation (Cuskelly et al., 2006) to provide the insights required to improve volunteer management practices (Warner, Newland, & Green, 2011). However, most of the research available is focused on the general volunteers' perspective and not of those who are in leadership positions (Nisbet, 2007). More research needs to be undertaken into the leadership and management of volunteers (Nisbet, 2007). A particular area for further research of volunteer management is the challenge of reducing volunteer attrition and turnover of volunteers (Cuskelly et al., 2006). Identifying volunteers' reasons for leaving an organisation are often seen as administratively uncontrollable (Claxton-Oldfield & Claxton-Oldfield, 2008). These don't account for all reasons why volunteers stop volunteering as there are many things that organisations could do to improve the volunteer experience to reduce attrition (Holmes & Lockstone-Binney, 2014). But we don't really know this because it is so rare for organisations to maintain reliable records that document objective measures of volunteer retention or turnover rates (Cuskelly et al., 2006). Operating effectively within the ambiguity of the current knowledge base requires high quality managers of volunteers, who are difficult to attract and retain in a resource-constrained sector.

2.4 Conclusion

Volunteer management researchers and practitioners have relied heavily on understanding volunteers' motivations to influence their strategies for retaining and managing volunteers (Warner et al., 2011). The review of the literature makes it clear that focus on volunteer motivation alone is inadequate to understand volunteer management issues such as volunteer attrition (Warner et al., 2011). It also highlights a gap in the literature to examine volunteer attrition from the perspective of volunteer managers. The following section provides a detailed description of a study that was conducted to address this gap in the literature. The next section acknowledges that there is a need to undertake exploratory qualitative research to identify various the approaches to volunteer attrition management.

Methodology

3 Methodology

It has been identified that there is a lack of knowledge relating to the management of attrition amongst organisations involving volunteers. This research helps to better comprehend the nature and impact that volunteer attrition is having on organisations that incorporate volunteering (Sekaran & Bougie, 2009). Volunteering has traditionally been studied using large quantitative surveys of volunteers with large data sets collected such as those from Australian Bureau of Statistics, International Social Science Survey and the World Values Survey (Lyons, McGregor-Lowndes, & O'Donoghue, 2006; Warner et al., 2011). These are designed and coded before they are administered and are very effective when the researcher knows exactly what information is desired and how it can be measured (Sekaran & Bougie, 2009). This quantitative method, however, does not provide the insights required to improve volunteer management practices (Warner et al., 2011) but it can be used to place this qualitative research into context. The complementary use of different techniques opens up different perspectives that can extend the knowledge gained when compared to using a single method (Ridder & Hoon, 2009). Quantitative techniques are useful for developing a concept and validating research outcomes as results take the form of statistical analysis (Bryman & Bell, 2011). While surveys do not have the flexibility to deal with different interpretations of respondents (O'Neill, 2001), many of the prominent studies into volunteering management mentioned in the literature review have been qualitative studies, suggesting this is an appropriate approach to researching volunteer management.

Being able to describe the themes that emerge from this study is essential to informing whether attrition is an issue for all managers of volunteers or more isolated to a particular

type of volunteering organisation (Sekaran & Bougie, 2009). While some broad descriptive information has been drawn from data and the literature available from local sources such as that provided by the Hunter Valley Research Foundation, this cannot provide all the information required to understand the attrition of volunteers. Volunteering ranges across a variety of industries in our community with 5.3 million people volunteering in Australia and over 600,000 not-for-profit organisations offering volunteering opportunities (Government, 2011). With Volunteering Australia and various government departments undertaking extensive reviews of the definition of volunteering and mutual obligation policies sharing similar language, many volunteers are not there by choice (Levy, 2006) or are self-managed through programs such as timebanking (Communities, 2013), making it difficult to assess the impact of volunteer attrition. Some volunteering organisations do not formally manage their volunteers and about half of those fulfilling the role of coordinating volunteers would not perceive themselves as managers of volunteers or else see it as a function within a broader role, which makes it difficult to engage with them as managers of volunteers (Simkus et al., 2014).

Whether or not people attrite as volunteers is influenced by organisational matters (Wilson, 2012). Much of volunteering research focuses on the individual volunteer and what motivates them. The elements that create volunteer satisfaction, commitment and loyalty can be found in the organisation of the volunteer experience (Wilson, 2012). Very few people who register to volunteer continue to volunteer after a year and the average length of time people volunteer is only 18 months (Hidalgo, 2009). The volunteer experience may promote or deter continuing involvement (Omoto & Snyder, 2002), as people will only continue to volunteer if they are satisfying their needs (Bussell & Forbes, 2006). The key to meeting volunteer expectations is the relationship between the individual and that volunteer organisation (Omoto & Snyder, 2002). To understand the attrition of volunteers, it is important to

understand organisation of the volunteer experience, so this research will focus on the managers of volunteers. Why volunteers are satisfied and less likely to attrite are to be found in the organisation of the volunteer experience (Wilson, 2012). Therefore, those who organise the volunteer experience—the managers of volunteers—are the appropriate participants for this study. In adopting the focus group technique, it is important to pull together a range of experts with experience and existing knowledge of volunteer management.

The goal of this research is to provide managers of volunteers with recommendations on where to focus their energy and resources required to improve their volunteer retention (Warner et al., 2011). A review of the broad amount of literature dedicated to volunteering demonstrates that research into this topic comes from many different disciplines such as sociology, management, psychology, law, economics or education, and employing a wide range of methods invariably resulting in disparate findings on the same topic (Suri, 2011). It has become clear that focusing on volunteer motivation is inadequate by itself to understanding volunteer management issues such as volunteer attrition (Warner et al., 2011). When researching the volunteering sector, it must be noted that the nature of volunteering itself can lead to some bias in the sample and results (Warner et al., 2011). This makes the selection of the research participants even more important.

3.1 Research Design

There are many different ways in which research into the attrition of volunteers could be conducted. Qualitative research is a systematic approach to the collection, organisation and

interpretation of data collected from talk or observations (Malterud, 2001). These research techniques can be used with broad complex topics in which respondents' interpretations may not correspond with reasoned answers (Mangen, 1999). Qualitative research is about trying to understand the experiences of others through their own interpretations of a problem (Hartman, 2004). Qualitative methods have the flexibility to adapt to various situations and to capture the differences in respondents' thoughts and feelings (O'Neill, 2001). This can be useful where the researcher may be seeking knowledge of the problem (Mangen, 1999). Qualitative methods cannot and do not claim to be representative of a population and they are open to undue influence by the researcher (O'Neill, 2001). Therefore, using only one particular technique or tool would be inappropriate. A way to mitigate this is to develop a hybrid delphi/focus group study. The biggest disadvantage of using delphi techniques is that there is no correct way to conduct this research (Keeney, Hasson, & McKenna, 2011). However, adopting a modified methodology which includes interviews allows the researcher to refine the data collected to a single topic. To undertake this research, audio recordings were used as the primary source of data collection. The literature on focus groups and interviewing suggests that video can be seen by respondents as more invasive of their privacy so they are more likely to share their opinions when audio recordings are used (Agan, Koch, & Rumrill Jr, 2008 2008). There are many different types of volunteering organisations (Waters & Bortree, 2012), which means there was a need to put this research into context. This diversity means that face-to-face, focused interviews can be adapted to deal with the variety of experiences and persons being interviewed (Sekaran & Bougie, 2009). The concept adopted was to seek out the views of key stakeholders in volunteering who have a broad experience in the volunteering sector. The methodology adopted was designed to help develop a greater depth of understanding of a particular subject, in this case volunteer attrition (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Interviews and other qualitative methods are able to pick up

on feelings and individual nuances of respondents (O'Neill, 2001) and there are a variety of qualitative interview methods that have been adopted for use in this research (Scheibelhofer, 2008). The key to this research being successful was ensuring the interviewer did not allow their own opinions and insights direct the interviewee's responses (Carson, 2001). Being aware of what can create bias, developing a rapport with the respondent and developing a schedule of questions minimised bias (Sekaran & Bougie, 2009). It was important for the interviewer to draw aspects of what was said during the focus groups into the interview to maintain the momentum and encourage the emergence of a story (Scheibelhofer, 2008).

3.1.1 Focus Groups

In this ethics-approved research, a qualitative technique—the focus group—was used to engage a panel of expert practitioners in the field of volunteer management. Focus groups have become an important methodological tool for research across a broad range of academic disciplines such as those which are looking into volunteer management (Hartman, 2004). In this situation, a focus group is a structured group method in which experts provide insights into volunteer attrition issues on which there is very little knowledge ("Interviewing Experts," 2009). This will provide a perspective from volunteer management practitioners on the subject of volunteer attrition and what could be done to improve volunteer management practices (Keeney et al., 2011 2011). This research has been designed to bring together experts in volunteer management from across the region and through interaction amongst these experts, come up with collaborative point of view (Czinkota & Ronkainen, 2011).

A series of two focus groups with managers of volunteers was used to drill deep into this topic and uncover themes because it just captures the considered responses of the

participants (Bauer, 2013). A focus group technique is an ideal method for researching this area because volunteer management is a professionally diverse field with varying experience, training and backgrounds amongst managers of volunteers (Keeney et al., 2011). The use of focus groups also recognises that managers of volunteers are a valuable source of information and knowledge (Hartman, 2004). In this situation, the focus groups were done in combination with in-depth interviews, and literature reviews were assessed to be more effective in researching this topic than a classical approach (Keeney et al., 2011). Group-based research is a stimulating, data-rich, inexpensive and flexible way to conduct research (Hartman, 2004). Critics suggest that group-based research is unreliable and has limited generalisability (Bryman & Bell, 2011). There is a threat that the researcher could lose control of the group and that the discussion becomes unrelated to the research or group-think and other peer behaviours (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Techniques used to minimise threats to this study include pre-planning the key questions through a schedule of questions (Hartman, 2004) for the focus group and in-depth interviews that can be viewed in the appendix. Focus groups were also kept relatively small in size to avoid negative impacts on participation and ensure full participation from each member of the group (Hartman, 2004).

3.1.2 In-Depth Interviews

Qualitative research attempts to make sense of people's responses, perceptions, experience, opinions, knowledge and feeling by probing deeply into the subject area (Fryer, Mackintosh, Stanley, & Crichton, 2012). In this research, six key stakeholders in the broader volunteering community across the Hunter region were recruited to help place the information of volunteer managers in context of the broader volunteering effort in the Hunter region, NSW, Australia.

The language used by participants is key to understanding and communicating the themes raised throughout the research (Fryer et al., 2012). There is a risk that like focus groups, in-depth interviews don't go off track and while providing rich data, much of the exchange could be off-topic (Bryman & Bell, 2011). To reduce the threats posed by this, a schedule of specific questions were used to direct the interview. This schedule was informed by the focus groups and is available in the appendix.

3.2 Research Participants

Managers of volunteers were chosen as research participants because it is a key responsibility of the manager of volunteers to work out how best to retain volunteers (Warner et al., 2011). They develop the programs and communications that are used not only to attract volunteers to an organisation, but to prevent attrition of volunteers once they are part of the team. Using a convenience sample is a purposeful sampling method in which research participants are selected to meet certain practical criteria (Farrokhi & Mahmoudi-Hamidabad, 2012). This is important because there is a need to recruit experts in volunteer management and coordination for this research to be an effective approach.. To best understand the management of volunteers, a sampling of managers of volunteers with more than six months' experience was seen as important by the researchers because it has been noted that volunteer satisfaction and desire to continue volunteering changes over time (Warner et al., 2011). While traditional thinking has humanities as a background to volunteer management, some literature suggests that the volunteer experience is more related to consumer experience and satisfaction demonstrated in marketing theories (Randle, 2012). Therefore, it is believed that

the longer someone is in a given role, the more likely they will have developed a more holistic understanding of the volunteering experience.

The management of volunteers is a complex job that relies on the ability to build relationships and networks and because of this, a hybrid of several sampling methods was used. The participants were invited and permissions obtained using a formal letter from the researcher. The aim was to recruit as many volunteer managers as practical within the scope of this research. In order to extend this research and gain a more diverse sample of managers of volunteers, a snowball sampling technique was used to recruit more managers of volunteers. Snowball sampling is useful in exploratory, qualitative and descriptive research especially if there are only a limited number of participants as in this research (Baltar & Brunet, 2012). This required encouraging word of mouth amongst participants and making the researcher accessible to potential participants. Preferable to using social networks to access participants, this approach helps to develop an understanding of the networks which play a role in the management of volunteers (Browne, 2005). Snowball sampling provides an opportunity to discover the connections between research participants and how information gained could be shared or distributed. It could also identify future research opportunities in volunteer management, which is recognised by key sector influencers as an area that needs a lot more research. It is understood by most managers of volunteers that there is a need for more research in this area (Millette & Gagné, 2008) (Brudney & Lee, 2014; de Abreu, Laureano, Alwi, da Silva, & Dionísio, 2015; Hustinx, 2010a; Simkus et al., 2014). Potential networking and career development opportunities that participation in this research could provide through interaction with key stakeholders in volunteer management would encourage managers of volunteers to participate in the process.

For this research, anonymity was not an issue due to the lack of personal data being collected. Interviewer bias, however, is an issue for this type of research (Sekaran & Bougie, 2009). It is important to acknowledge that the researcher comes into this study with preconceptions, having been inspired to research this topic as a former volunteer and volunteer manager. Being aware that personal experience coupled with the reading required to develop the theoretical frame of reference behind this topic could impact the results was important to avoiding the researcher influencing the result (Malterud, 2001). Purposeful sampling requires access to key informants in the field and in this situation needs key practitioners in volunteer management (Suri, 2011). Initial contact with managers of volunteers using a convenience sampling method in which expert knowledge and size of their social network is large was preferred and accessed via the Hunter Volunteer Centre's Managers of Volunteers in Northern NSW (MoViNN), a professional network for volunteer managers in the Hunter region, NSW, Australia. The participants were invited to volunteer in this research.

Their knowledge and understanding of the volunteering sector in the Hunter region is significant. Below is a brief summary of the diverse range of participants. Participants work in the Hunter region, NSW, Australia. While qualitative research leads to theoretical generalisations, this research highlights experiences in the Hunter region, not that of the broader Australian experience. Notwithstanding, it is believed that this region provides a strong example of an Australian volunteering management experience. Its diverse range of communities including sea change communities, tourism-based communities, rural, urban and suburban communities, making it an ideal area from which to generate theoretical saturation for research into volunteering. This conclusion is confirmed by the region being

chosen by the NSW Office of Volunteering as the ideal location to trial their major volunteering initiative Timebanking (Communities, 2013).

Focus group participants	
Manager of volunteers in a large charity	Runs a small technology enabled program for a large NGO with approximately 15 volunteers
Manager of volunteers in the community sector	Manages up to 60 volunteers at a time who visit elderly people in the community.
Manager of volunteers in natural resource management field	Manages approximately 150 volunteers across 15 groups actively participating in large bush regeneration projects
Event manager of volunteers and project-based manager of volunteers	Manages various projects which use volunteers. Currently manages three projects, one with 500 volunteers, in a one-off event capacity, an ongoing program with 10 volunteers and volunteering as a transition into the workforce program.
Manager of volunteers in disability services	Manages regional volunteer services for a specialised disability service provider.
Manager of volunteers in health services	Manages volunteers and student placements in a major children's hospital.
Manager of volunteers in community services	Manages volunteer services for a large NGO in the region with over 400 volunteers across a variety of community services.

Stakeholder interviews	
Manager and facilitator of a regional training provider	Provides professional development and accredited qualifications for managers of volunteers.
Manager of a volunteer resource centre	Manages 80 volunteers and four staff to provide volunteer resources and support services to over 200 member organisations.
Senior manager of a large emergency service and sports-based volunteer organisation	Manages and provides training and support to 7,500 volunteers over 13 areas.
Senior public servant	Has a strategic and operational responsibility in volunteering policy areas for State Government.
Manager of managers of volunteers in family services	Manages two volunteer coordinators who manage volunteers in multiple programs across the family services area.

A sample was drawn from a cross section of managers of volunteers throughout the Hunter region. The geographic limitation of this research was not believed to be substantial as it still generated a theoretical saturation of volunteer management experiences across the chosen geographic area.

3.3 Research Location

The participants in this study all have extensive experience in volunteering that comes from a broad range of organisations and working with several thousand volunteers throughout the

Hunter region, NSW, Australia. The Hunter region is Australia's largest regional area with a population of more than 620,530 people of which between 16 and 37% are volunteers. It has an active and diverse volunteer sector providing an ideal location in which to research the impact of attrition across the sector (HVRF, 2013). The Hunter region was selected for this study because the juxtaposition of rural, industrial and urban volunteering opportunities across the region provides a rich and diverse data source for this study. This diverse experience is illustrated by the Hunter Volunteer Centre (2014) claim that Hunter residents are active in 14,000 different volunteer roles across 23 industries.

3.4 The Research Process

Ethics approval to conduct this research was initially sought for this research from the University of Newcastle's Ethics Committee. Once it was received, contact was made with the Managers of Volunteers in Northern New South Wales Network (MoViNN) to facilitate access to potential research participants. Potential participants were provided with an invitation and information sheet which they read and agreed to prior to participating in this project. The managers of volunteers who participated were very supportive of this research and committed to encouraging and supporting research into the volunteering sector. The invitation and information sheet was distributed to 60 members of MOViNN, all of whom have been managers of volunteers for six or more months within the Hunter region. Using a purposeful sampling technique through an established network such as MOViNN is useful in exploratory, qualitative and descriptive research, especially if there is a limited number of participants, as is the case in this research (Baltar & Brunet, 2012). A total of seven experienced volunteer managers participated in the focus group. They come from a variety of

volunteer organisations which include charitable organisations, natural resource management, public hospitals, large events, pathway to employment programs, disability service providers and large NGO's.

This research is informed by a broad range of literature on volunteering, volunteer management and social capital. In an effort to meet the research objectives, the first group of questions asked how big an impact volunteer attrition has on the success of an organisation, whether it affects the manager's ability to meet their obligations, and whether it changes how they manage their volunteers. These questions are listed in the focus group schedule in Appendix 1. The questions were intended to determine whether the manager's perceptions of volunteer attrition are consistent with the literature which suggests that managers of volunteers are crucial to maintaining the sustainability of a volunteer program by improving volunteer retention (Wolcott, 2008).

The research then explored which management techniques are currently being used to manage volunteer attrition, as it is important to understand how volunteers are organised and managed to determine whether there are better ways to manage the challenge of volunteer attrition (Barnes & Sharpe, 2009). Key to understanding each organisation's relationship with their volunteers and how it is managed is to understand who is responsible for managing the volunteers, what tasks they are required to do, how well they are resourced and what skills sets they possess. This information then needed to be put into a context that could be broadly understood.

To ensure the research is robust and effective, it was appropriate that the focus group discussions be combined with in-depth, one-on-one interviews and a literature review

(Keeney et al., 2011). In-depth interviews were used to further explore themes about volunteer attrition and the broader contextual issues that emerged from the focus groups and situate those themes within a temporal, cultural and political context. Thus, key participants were interviewed to allow further exploration of the themes raised, contextualise the data collected from the focus groups and consequently refine the conclusions of this study. As with the focus groups, an invitation and information sheet was sent to potential interview participants, six of whom initially agreed to participate. However, due to personal reasons, one had to withdraw at the last minute. Those who did participate included a senior manager of the Hunter Volunteer Centre, a senior member of the NSW Office of Volunteering, a facilitator of volunteer management training in the Hunter region, a manager responsible for volunteer coordinators within the Family Action Centre at the University of Newcastle, and a senior manager at the Hunter Branch of Surf Lifesaving Australia, which has an impressive 7,500 volunteers across 13 different clubs. Each of these participants is highly respected in the Hunter region's volunteering sector.

The analysis of the research began in the early stages of data collection, as with many qualitative studies, and continued throughout the research project (Bradley, Curry, & Devers, 2007). The initial analysis informed the schedule of questions in Appendix 2, which were put to the key stakeholders in the one-on-one interviews. This allowed the research to explore themes further raised in the focus groups and put them into a broader context. Some of these issues included the perception that volunteer attrition did not have a large impact on the success of volunteer organisations, that there could be more support from employees of organisations for volunteers, and that mental health plays a larger role in maintaining strong volunteer programs than previously acknowledged in the literature. Questions similar to those posed in the focus groups were also asked in the one-on-one interviews to identify any

significant differences between the perception of managers of volunteers and key stakeholders within the volunteer sector. All interviews and focus groups were recorded and transcribed. The transcribed data was then subject to analysis.

3.5 Analysis

The analysis of the focus groups and interviews was conducted using a thematic analysis, which is a practical approach to identifying themes from interview data (Yardley, Brosnan, & Richardson, 2013). These themes were then used to develop the results, the intent being to group similar ideas in themes and then refine those themes to be explicit as possible (Baptiste, 2001). The themes reflect the purpose of this study to understand the attrition of volunteers in the Hunter region. The first step was to transcribe the results of the focus groups. Thematic analysis then examined the narrative, which requires different responses to be clearly identified (Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013). Not all the responses given were relevant to the research, such as when building trust with the research participants, which required the identification and removal of non-relevant small talk (Weston et al., 2001). This then required each response to be tagged into relevant categories that related to the research questions (Baptiste, 2001). The themes that emerge from the participants' experiences were identified through this process (Bradley, Curry, & Devers, 2007). This provides the basis for organising and comparing various alternatives by sorting these themes into answers relevant to the research questions (Malterud, 2001). Such comparisons are usually done informally (Bradley et al., 2007). By following the same process with the set of interviews, identification of common threads allowed for the research results to be refined (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). The results identified through the thematic analysis and the theories

identified through the literature review explain the outcomes (Bradley et al., 2007) within the context of volunteer management of attrition in the Hunter region.

Results

4 Results

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the study in relation to each of the research objectives described in the introduction. The results are presented as a series of themes that emerged from the analysis of data collected in the focus groups and interviews that were conducted with diverse range participants who have strong knowledge of volunteering in the Hunter region. The key themes that emerged are that attrition is considered a normal operational reality with the impact of volunteer attrition experienced indirectly and is complicated by the changing nature of volunteering. The volunteering experience is the responsibility of the manager of volunteers who need increased organisational support and respect for the volunteer effort to achieve organisational outcomes such as reducing volunteer attrition. Managers of volunteers can provide this by empowering volunteers and delivering enhanced training and mentoring opportunities for their volunteers. It was identified as important to improve reporting and feedback in volunteering organisations, provide specific role descriptions for volunteers, improve the professionalism of manager of volunteers and ensure authentic recognition for the volunteer effort. This research demonstrates that future developments in the volunteering sector must include reviewing accepted policies and procedures to ensure good governance of volunteer organisations, removing perceived impediments to volunteering such as the time it takes to be inducted, and improving networking and professional development for manager of volunteers, including time management plans and strategies. This research also demonstrated a desire for research that informs practitioners about the changing nature of volunteering. Firstly, this chapter provides an overview and profile of the participants in this study.

4.2 Research Question 1 – The impact and importance of volunteer attrition on the success of volunteer organisations

In this section of the results, the findings were very intriguing in that they indicate attrition does not directly impact the success of volunteer organisations. This does not mean that attrition did not impact the volunteer program delivery as it does generate costs for a volunteer organisation. Notwithstanding, the research found that managers of volunteers saw that certain factors, such as the changing attitudes of volunteers towards the volunteer experience, are changing the nature of volunteering. For example, episodic, event and leisure volunteering activities are growing in popularity while traditional, ongoing volunteer seems to be on the decline.

4.2.1.1 Attrition is normal

The managers of volunteers who participated in the research did not identify the challenge of attrition as having a major impact on the success of their volunteer programs. In the first instance, when a manager of volunteers in health services remarked when asked about volunteer attrition,

“(I) don’t have that problem with that, I have lots of volunteers.”

The other manager of volunteers supported this.

“I have low turnover, not a lot of volunteers, but don’t lose a lot”

“Anything over one year for us is long term. I don’t have a problem with that.”

“They'll come in and have a try. If they really love it, I have them for 70 years and that, but probably 30% try.”

However, this doesn't support what the majority of the literature suggests. The literature was supported by the research participants who hire managers of volunteers, who were surprised that attrition management was not a priority amongst manager of volunteers.

“I am very surprised that any volunteer manager wouldn't be aware of the attrition rates.”

This disparity appears partially due to the acceptance that volunteer attrition is administratively uncontrollable, as suggested earlier in the literature review. The manager of a volunteer resource centre seemed to share a similar take on attrition:

“But I don't think it's something we can control, I think it's something we can manage.”

This view is supported by a manager of managers of volunteers.

“So it's not a problem; we just put that into the planning.”

However, managers acknowledged that because they are always recruiting and training it is always difficult to assess the impact attrition has on their work, for example, in emergency services:

“I am continually training in there... it isn't as easy to ... as obvious for me to notice (attrition).”

It is natural to perceive the attrition of volunteers as negative but this is not always the case. Sometimes, particular volunteers can have detrimental effects on others, something all managers of volunteers appeared to agree with strongly.

“There are always a few rotten eggs in the basket.”

“I’ve had a few unsuccessful [chuckle] volunteers, basically, not following what they were asked to do.”

“When you get that one person (volunteer) who... That’s it, it’s really hard when in corporate change management we called them corporate psychopaths. So it’s long term, it’s passive aggressive it effects the entire organisation”

Event, tourism and corporate volunteering have volunteer attrition built into the experience through short term roles that expire after the completion of the event or project. Episodic volunteering can be a positive for the volunteer organisation and the volunteer. Attrition is also experienced informally by volunteering organisations that revolve around a particular social, cultural or sporting activity. A sporting manager of volunteers shared:

“You understand, the juniors from 5-14, so their parents move through with them. They’ll only stay usually for about three or four years.”

Some volunteering activities are seasonal; for example, a manager of managers of volunteers suggested:

“I imagine you have experience with this. For example, NAB call up and say I have got 10 people who want to come out and weed some ponds [it was acknowledged this is true] which might be great but you needed the ponds weeded last week, not this week.”

Others, such as sporting volunteers have a definite season:

“I train them all winter, ready for the summer.”

For a manager of volunteers in a large charitable organisation that has a seasonal peak, natural attrition was an opportunity to help manage her volunteer numbers:

“By the end of that period, people will naturally just be leaving for one reason or another, anyway.”

Volunteering can also provide a transition or a pathway to somewhere else. The attitude of a government public servant and a manager of volunteers who run programs designed as a transition into the workforce, agreed that transitional volunteering is positive:

“So from managing these folks properly, our biggest issue with retention became that they were moving to employment, so we thought that was a tremendous positive. It’s no problem training more volunteers in that context.”

“While other teams... ... [I] help them find a job as long as they can then give me huge amount of support.”

There was also a suggestion that attrition was an opportunity for an organisation to improve its capacity or skill level by recruiting a different mix of skills. It also can help to refresh and invigorate volunteer programs with the enthusiasm and energy that new volunteers bring. This was confirmed by a manager of volunteers giving examples of ongoing volunteers being reinvigorated by crossover activities with episodic volunteers. For example, in the natural resource management field, events that involve episodic volunteering such as National Tree Day can have a positive effect on ongoing volunteers:

“It gives them [ongoing volunteers] the ability to feel a little bit rewarded and a little bit proud of the work they’re doing, ‘cause they’re sharing it with visiting people [episodic volunteers] and having to talk about it.”

It was also suggested that volunteers who move on to paid work are more philanthropically generous as a result of their volunteer experience. This is supported by a project based manager of volunteers, who said:

“Keep them. Grow them. Retain them. And, if they get jobs, bask in that glory, because that's a good thing. But, invite them back with an alternative, another role to be part of what you've got. We convert an individual to a volunteer, to an ambassador.”

4.2.1.2 Indirect outcomes

The monetary and time cost of training and inducting a volunteer in a particular role impacts the organisation's budget and resources. This is supported by a manager of manager of volunteers.

“It cost that organisation so much money to recruit volunteers and then train them.”

This was also noticed particularly in the health service where an induction can be a longer and more costly process than in other industries:

“They apply, go through the process, drop out, and that can be expensive and time consuming.”

For the larger NGO's, recruiting is a major undertaking that has significant costs as it needs to meet branding and other organisational expectations.

“We have a unit who just recruits from Sydney and we send what we want. They advertise and then I do stuff like flyers at uni on top of that.”

Attrition is indirectly impacting participant organisations that have limited resources. For example, by acknowledging that volunteers will leave and compensating for that in their organisational planning, managers of volunteers are accepting the additional cost of training and inductions for replacement volunteers:

“I’ll recruit more than I need, because I know that a few people are gonna drop off before they even get in.”

Having an expectation that volunteers absorb the cost of training themselves without getting something in return is acknowledged as being unrealistic by those involved in volunteer policy development:

“It’s not a viable proposition for volunteers to get nothing out of their volunteering experience. The personal benefits are abundant in it and we need to work out what the, I guess, the optimal mix of that is.”

The reality is that training is a huge expense for organisations and volunteers are asked to contribute to help pay for it. This was something that was pointed out by those in sport volunteering:

“They have to pay to be trained here, buy their [training] resources. They actually pay to join [the volunteer organisation].”

This is despite governments contributing massive amounts of resources to the volunteering effort, which was made clear by someone who works on the state government’s response to volunteering:

“Volunteers are critical in supporting quite a lot of service provisions and it's funded by government... ... [an] amount of resources appropriately are devoted to the managing of the volunteers.”

Despite this funding for the volunteering sector, many of the respondents have made it clear that their organisations have to rely on their volunteers to contribute financially to meet the costs of training and materials:

“We are constantly saying please to help the community, please pay and we're not government funded. Nobody gives us money so it's a bit mean.”

But it is not only the financial costs on which attrition has an impact; for example, the time spent training someone, the time a volunteer is providing and the time managers spend recruiting is time during which managers and volunteers could be doing other things. This was mentioned by a manager of volunteers in disability services, who noted that the process of finding a volunteer can take time:

“We might even need to wait for the right volunteer rather than the first who walks in off the street.”

This applies to the volunteers' time, too, not just that of the organisation:

“Their time is as valuable as everyone else.”

This leads to a situation where a manager of volunteers has to weigh up the expense of maintaining a particular volunteer role in the organisation. In technology-enabled volunteering, for example, those who have the skills often don't have the opportunity to volunteer for longer periods.

“...students, their time with us tends to be shorter, but for me that works out fine. I'd love them to stay forever, but if they turn up and they can learn things really

quickly and know exactly what they're doing, but they only stay for a year, that's probably worth more to me than having somebody come in here that requires a lot of support and a lot of training, but they stick around for a few years.”

4.2.1.3 The evolving volunteering environment

Another issue that became clear after it was raised through the series of focus groups and interviews was that volunteering is changing. Thus, what was perceived as volunteer attrition and what is considered normal is changing. How people saw volunteering and how they choose to volunteer are very different to how it once was and this creates challenging issues for those managing volunteer attrition. This was made clear through the changing volunteer attitudes experienced by managers of volunteers:

“When I first started people would do eight-hour... ..no one minded doing... ..eight hours. They won't do more than four hours now; [volunteers] won't tolerate that. So yeah, things have changed.”

“I have volunteers come in and say they volunteer with someone different each year and this year they want to volunteer with us.”

As a result of this, volunteer organisations will need to evolve and can no longer expect that what they have historically done to retain volunteers will work just because it is what they have always done. It could suggest that the expectations of the organisation and the expectation of the volunteer are difficult to match up. What was clear is that when a volunteer and a volunteer role match and evolve together, it results in a long and productive relationship; when they don't, then volunteer engagement with the organisation is often short-lived:

“So the demand for volunteering is high, But when you talk to volunteers, they also want the same thing. They say, ‘Look, I’m here to volunteer, but there are not many roles.’ There’s not much choice there.”

“One of the issues is that people join in order to help out in disasters, and that’s less than 1% of the work ...”

“I do know that in the aged care industry, for things like Meals on Wheels and things like that, it’s problematic because their volunteers have become ... are aging and getting older, and they’re having difficulty with matching numbers or meeting their needs.”

In terms of the impact it will have on policy, governments are aware of the challenge of volunteer attrition. They are aware of the cost and inefficiencies that are created if volunteer management is not successfully addressing volunteer attrition:

“The opportunity cost of recruiting volunteers and seeing them walk out the door, you might train them and so you put some energy and time and resources into that, that’s unacceptably high, essentially.”

Government policy areas are creating increased challenges for manager of volunteers, most notably the impact of more people volunteering to fulfil mutual obligation requirements imposed by study.

“Having to meet the needs of the volunteer ... they have 400 hours and I go ‘Aargh how am I going to do that?’ ”

“Also, if they only need to do 60 hours, I know I am only going to get them for 60 hours and that can be an issue.”

This was even more pronounced for mutual obligation requirements imposed by governments, with many managers of volunteers wondering whether those with mutual obligations are really volunteers if they don't want to be there:

“The problem with some of the volunteers is they just don't want to be there. They're doing 15 hours for Centrelink, or they're there because they've got to do it as part of a course or whatever the reason. As soon as they don't have to be there any longer, they'll just be ... So their care factor is much lower than the better volunteers.”

This suggests that when volunteering is not perceived to be a choice, it can lead to problems of having volunteers hang around who really don't want to be there, which participants agreed make it difficult to maintain high levels of service and can disrupt strategies to mitigate volunteer attrition.

University student volunteers are active in volunteering and highly sought after by some manager of volunteers but they want very different outcomes from their experience than traditional volunteers. This has changed the design of volunteer programs to meet the students' needs. The following statement reflects how sought after university student volunteers are in the family services sector:

“Organisations could be quite serious about taking undergrads. They're resourceful, clever and highly motivated people ... That would be nice.”

Other manager of volunteers also shared similar complimentary views on how valuable university student volunteering is and what they can bring to a volunteer program:

“Our uni students are usually some of the hardest working, dedicated and innovative people and I rely on them because I am confident they can manage the situation.”

“Our uni students want to help out and it’s great they are so full of energy. I find them the most compassionate people because they have grown up with more open-minded parents than predecessors.”

However, participants did raise a few problems related to attrition incurred by managing student volunteers. These include the impact of their studies and what happens once their course ends on their volunteer obligations:

“It’s really hard because their timetable changes and wants to stay in a program but we can’t change their days.”

It was also clear that university obligations can create difficulty, particularly when exams and assignments are scheduled:

“I had a guy who usually does our bulk emails, etc., hasn’t been there because he has had exams and I didn’t realise it wasn’t being done until it hadn’t been done.”

“I rely on them ... Then I get call, ‘Where are our volunteers?’ ” Other participants also suggested that people are looking for volunteering opportunities that fit their schedule rather than fitting their life around the activity in which they are interested:

“The problem I have with students is they can only volunteer this day at this time because they volunteer here and here and here. They have perfectly slotted out lives. It’s like a school program.”

Managers of volunteers at times lose the services of good volunteers, not because they don’t want to volunteer but because of other factors; this, according to participants, can be even more pronounced amongst university student volunteers. The idea that in a changing

environment young volunteers are also more willing to adapt than older volunteers is strongly demonstrated by an example from a manager of volunteers in a charity:

"I find that those younger people tend to be more proactive even though their lifestyle can change dramatically very quickly. They still want to help, in some way, if they can. I had a girl who was meant to be coming in and uni's taken over... I basically said uni holidays, that's our busiest time, So if you wanna, come in during that time. So, I think with some of the older people... have just been like, 'No, I can't do this anymore.' "

Changing attitudes and expectations to communications was suggested by managers of volunteers in this study as something that was impacting the volunteer experience. For example, university students need lots of reminders and electronic communications as noted by a manager of volunteers in disability services:

"Uni students are always asking us to communicate via Facebook but our organisation has a policy against that. They want instant communication."

A manager of volunteers in the community sector made it clear her volunteers were the opposite and relied heavily on traditional mail outs:

"'Why are you doing the mail? Why?' 'I said, 'Because out of 40 people only eight have emails.' "

This was backed up by a manager of volunteers in natural resource management area who had a similar experience:

"There's always a few community members who say, 'Can I have that in a letter in the post? Thanks.' "

4.3 Research Question 2 – Who is responsible for managing volunteer programs?

Who is responsible for managing volunteers is not as simple a question as it appears. The people who manage volunteers are as diverse as the roles volunteers fill and the people who volunteer. The research results outlined what it takes to be a manager of volunteers, which skills are essential to being a professional manager of volunteers. The research also highlights that there are some problems; not everyone involved in organisations that use volunteers are pleased about working alongside volunteers. This leads to unrealistic expectations about what volunteer management is, and disrespect for those who participate in it.

4.3.1.1 *Volunteers as Human Resources*

It appears in the literature that there is an increasing crossover between volunteer management techniques and human resource management. However, volunteer managers in the research are not convinced: *“Does it sit under operations, does it fit under HR?”*

“A lot of what I do is same as HR do but it’s [not].”

Stakeholders are more definite on the role of human resources in managing volunteers:

“Something that’s a problem, you could see as an HR challenge or an HR opportunity, and I think that sort of maturity of judgement would take us a long way.”

When asked what they look for in a manager of volunteers, a manager of volunteer coordinators described a very different role to that of a HR professional:

“There needs to be a direct qualification in something like the social sciences because there is no full degree on volunteer management.”

This is because:

“Volunteers will stay when they feel honoured so a person who manages volunteers needs to understand the complexities of human interaction.”

This seemed to highlight the conflict between how people saw the role of manager of volunteers and the tasks undertaken by practitioners so managers of volunteers where asked, if they were replacing themselves, what they would look for in their replacement. The views of managers of volunteers seemed consistent with the identified conflict between the perception that a manager of volunteers primarily needs strong interpersonal skills and the management skills needed to undertake operational tasks. Some key tasks identified were related to communication:

“Probably just very flexible and willing to change and adapt to things very easily. Also, just good communication, and you have to have that confidence in being able to let volunteers know what you expect from them and let them know if they're not doing that.”

“Time management, communication, a really open personality in order to cater for all the different personalities that you deal with.”

“(Kindness, respect. Definitely respect and assistance.”

“I think a lot of people forget that volunteers, they work hard, and you've gotta know what to do, how to reward them, how to thank them, how to communicate with each of them. So definitely that kind of thing.”

Managers of volunteers also mentioned that there was a need for more training in administration and human resource management. This is reinforced by the perceptions of participants that increasing administration and human resource management requirements are being imposed on volunteer programs:

“Admin, you can train them to do that and, like, human resources.”

“I would love to offer some media training. Yeah, that's about it at the moment. MYOB training, the expensive training, leadership training, they are the things you would love to say to people, ‘I can afford the best to come in and teach you how to do that.’ ”

It was also suggested that other key skills were stakeholder management and networking capabilities. Managers of volunteers felt that a lot of the success of volunteer programs relied heavily on the relationship between the organisation and the volunteers:

“One is relationship and engagement, stakeholder management. They're all critically important. That's one set of skills. The second set of skills is the quality of your thinking. I think that in volunteer management you want someone who's great with people and someone who is a bit smart, who can think things through.”

“That networking capacity, that either runs over or under that structured education, that says talking to your colleges whether it be normal networking, it could be mentoring, buddy system.”

“You've gotta be very open to not sort of ... You've gotta be the manager, but not so much that hierarchy, boss person. You've gotta see yourself as equals, at a human level.”

This would suggest that volunteer management is a more complex and requires a more unique skill set than general management. It was also pointed out that managing mental health was an increasingly important issue for which managers of volunteers need to be prepared:

“Mental health first aid would be really good. I've heard about it; never been able to get into it.”

“I think mental health issues, managing mental health is a really big problem. I think it's a really big problem, and I don't think it's gonna go away.”

This was an issue for managers of volunteers because they didn't expect it to be such a large issue amongst volunteers, and that it puts a strain on the time available to spend with other volunteers.

“That's [mental health issues] actually quite common with volunteers. I found ... And I didn't expect to find it, but through my time at the organization that I was working at, you do have quite a lot of people with either mental disabilities or physical disabilities or health issues and they're not necessarily getting in the way of them doing their duties as a volunteer, but it's certainly stopping them from getting paid employment.”

4.3.1.2 Organisational responsibility

In trying to understand who is responsible for managing volunteers, it was found that there was unwillingness from employees to accept responsibility for volunteers:

“In my organisation as a manager of volunteers everything to do with volunteer must be your responsibility.”

“If its bad news, they are happy to pick and choose who they want but to tell someone they don’t want them, that is your job. This person gives me bad vibes. Ring them and tell them we don’t want them.”

“I do the recruitment and they are all very happy this person is wonderful. Then the volunteer does something out of the ordinary and I get the phone call straight away. You need to come and talk to them. Hang on, you have been working with them for six months. I barely know them, you know.”

“I just had this with a team. They are a remote team that, yes, they are volunteers and I manage from here but they have people on the ground there that they work with. They have an issue and I got a call saying I have to do a management review on them. And I go, well, ‘I haven’t spoken with them in a while.’ ”

It is not the lack of wanting to take responsibility or resource constraints but the quality of the relationships with the volunteers that determines who is ultimately responsible for a volunteer program. Sometimes it’s not the person with the title but the person who is the one who understands the volunteers best. One thing that is important for those who want to take responsibility for managing volunteers is to understand what their volunteers are offering,

giving up and what alternatives they have if they choose not to volunteer with you (Boehm, 2009). This is not always taken into consideration when designing volunteer programs:

“We need lots more volunteers. And then when it comes to recognition time or training time and that, it's sort of like, ‘Oh no, we don't have money in our organisation for that.’ ”

“With volunteering, the most critical element 'cause I'm giving you my time, coupled with my time is my skills, my knowledge and my ability. If I don't feel my time's being worthwhile, in other words, I have this expectation, I've got this reality. They're not going to rush back. They either leave, withdraw.”

Volunteers are a limited natural resource; there are only so many volunteers with time to give and they want their time to mean something. They don't want their time wasted so taking responsibility for volunteer management can be about imposing artificial constraints to ensure that volunteers are getting value for their time:

“When I am told to recruit more volunteers, it's something that I constantly push back with. I am not going to get more volunteers in until I have the work for them. I would rather have two satisfied volunteers than four dissatisfied volunteers.”

Ultimately, everyone in an organisation is responsible for managing the volunteers and ensuring the success of volunteer programs. There appears to be strong feeling that not everyone in the workplace shares this belief:

“Our computer person just blanket said, ‘No, volunteers can't touch our computers. They can't go anywhere near it.’ I asked why; her reply was, ‘Well, they should [not] be here doing something that somebody here could do because they are being paid.’ She became a real barrier for getting volunteers in.”

“I have one employee who is very procedural and finds others that are doing similar roles very threatening and have lost volunteers because of this one person.”

“There is a lot of suspicion so I guess another problem is where the line on what is a volunteer is allowed to do and what they aren’t allowed to do.”

4.3.1.3 Respecting the volunteer effort

Throughout this research it became clear that expectations and respect of volunteers and manager of volunteers and what they do is not always what it should or could be. As a person who trains a lot of volunteers observed:

“I just don't think that volunteers are supported as well as they could by upper management. I don't think upper management truly appreciates volunteers as well as they could. Now I think some organisations talk a lot about it and give a lot of lip service to the fact that they might have so many numbers of volunteers working with them.”

This attitude filters through the whole organisation, creating an organisational culture that can be counterproductive for the success of a volunteer program:

“And that’s the thing if you hear an organisation go, ‘They are only volunteers,’ you know as soon as you hear only you don’t want to volunteer for that organisation.”

This can lead to other problems, particularly when it created a perception that the manager of volunteers is only around to give bad news or if there is trouble with volunteers.

“I mean, I walked in to introduce myself with cake and say hi. They just looked at me. ‘What’s wrong, why are you here?’ Nothing, I [am] just coming to see how things are going and if you need anything. They just replied, ‘We need a new pricing gun.’

“I find it difficult to manage those volunteers. You have to really win them over. They see you as bureaucratic and represent something else; you’re against them, a threat—they were here first—when you’re there for them.”

This is particularly a problem when the manager of volunteers is trying to manage the attrition of volunteers. It makes it difficult to undertake simple tasks that are considered standard for employees, such as giving notice or an exit interview to a volunteer. This is demonstrated in community services volunteering:

“I would never get someone coming in and say, ‘In a month, I am finishing up.’ I get the nice ones who come and say, ‘Today is my last day.’ ”

It’s not just the organisation’s management or volunteer attitudes towards the manager of volunteers that is an issue; there are cases where the respect between volunteers can be an issue, such as mentioned by a manager of volunteers in the community sector:

“My biggest issue is... it’s about volunteer behaviours to each other. They can be really harsh to one another.”

This is obvious when external pressures to bring down costs lead to unrealistic expectations. This was suggested by a manager of volunteers in health services and supported by an observation of a volunteer stakeholder:

“I am getting a lot of people within the organisation who want to cut costs [due to external pressures] who want to use volunteers to replace staff and you can’t do that.”

“Cost cutting is becoming so extreme these days that even if volunteer managers do the right thing and keep statistics in terms of how much money their volunteers are saving the organisation, it’s often just dismissed.”

This unreal expectation or lack of respect was articulated best by a public servant, who said:

“Too few people think that volunteers need to be managed properly and that the sort of perception is that because volunteer labour is free, it should be free to use volunteer services, but I think our experience indicates that it would cost as much to manage a volunteer properly as it costs to manage a staff person.”

The unrealistic expectation of volunteers and the type of work that they should do is supported by some of the anecdotes from managers of volunteers:

“ I had one [request] last week to have a volunteer to clean the goannas which are toilet chairs and I was, ‘I can guarantee that I am not going to get a volunteer to clean 20 toilet chairs.’ Her response was, ‘Oh well, thought we would give it a go.’ ”

With key stakeholders, such as government, it was acknowledged that when not regularly dealing with volunteer management issues it is easy to lose touch with what tasks need to happen for a successful volunteer program:

“I think it’s really easy to be disconnected from the front line of the workforce and I think it’s particularly easy to disregard volunteers in that way ‘cause you’re not

paying them. So it's almost like whatever they give you is a gift, but clearly, there's more sophistication that's possible than that."

This is supported by the managers of volunteers when they describe some of their experiences with senior management:

"When I came into the job [the previous coordinator had] left and so my bosses came in and said, 'We don't know what the volunteer coordinator did so we are going to take this opportunity to redefine the role.' So I was like, 'So what am I meant to be doing?' And they asked, so what do I think my position should be."

"I'm sitting there, thinking, I have done this for 22 years and they don't recognise that I can do it. When I said I could, 'Oh really, can you?' They don't know what I did."

This disconnect with what volunteer management is extends to the community. How people perceive managers of volunteers is important as it has an effect on the quality of the individuals who are attracted to these positions. The following demonstrates the community's impressions of volunteer management:

"People are constantly asking me if I am getting paid."

"I have an issue that my title says coordinator (me, too) and person below me is administrator and people think that they are my boss."

"Yeah, I'm a volunteer coordinator and they respond, 'Oh, so what do you coordinate?' Oh no, volunteers. And they go, 'Oh so you get paid to do that?' "

This lack of recognition for the skills associated with volunteer management is only just starting to be recognised by key stakeholders:

“So I think that we allow volunteer management to be dumbed down by calling it ‘volunteer management’, and I think we need to improve its depth and effectiveness by calling it ‘people management’ essentially.”

“A significant part of that is you’re not a volunteer and you’re not coordinators either. A coordinator is someone who does a timetable or something. You are manager.”

“Yeah, and we are developing skills that could be transferred in many different areas in corporate areas you guys could fly. It’s realistic.”

There appears to be a strong desire to better recognise the contribution, not just of volunteers, but of those who are facilitating that volunteer experience.

4.4 Research Question 3 – Identify specific attrition management strategies employed by managers and their effectiveness.

There are a number of approaches being adopted by managers of volunteers to reduce the risk of attrition to the delivery of their services. These include empowering volunteers and giving them ownership of the program or task, to train them, to up-skill them and increase their confidence, which will encourage further contribution. Managers of volunteers are also improving their reporting and feedback process to better understand what is happening amongst volunteers, allowing them to develop specific roles and review procedures and policies regularly. But consistently across all volunteer organisations, public recognition of volunteers is the most important strategy they use.

4.4.1.1 Empowerment of volunteers

Recently there have been some efforts made by organisations to empower volunteers. There seem to be two clear approaches to meet the challenge of attrition. One approach is to treat volunteers the same as paid staff, where everyone is on the same team without differentiation. This is how the project-based manager of volunteers and a manager in family services approach it:

“Currently we have a staff of 80. We treat all our volunteers as staff. They are called staff but only five are paid, only one full time and 75 are volunteers.”

“This is about how you manage staff and I think one of the success we have always had is we treat our volunteers as being our staff.”

The other managers of volunteers nodded and agreed that this seems to be a simple approach that does have a positive impact on volunteer turnover, thus reducing the attrition of volunteers. Another approach put forward by a manager of volunteers in natural resource management indicated that empowering volunteers to step up, take leadership roles and providing them with an opportunity to take ownership of their tasks was a positive strategy:

“I had a lot of teams, so I used to encourage the better volunteers to step up and act a team leader role and I found that was also another way of breaking down that barrier of communication.”

These strategies in principle appear to be supported by those in positions which inform government policy when they suggest:

“Part of the solution to that is to give more volunteers the permission to be managers of other volunteers, nurturers, leaders of other volunteers.”

Empowerment of volunteers seems to be a strategy that is widely endorsed by managers of volunteers.

4.4.1.2 Training and mentoring for volunteers

This research clearly demonstrates that programs where volunteers have clear directions about their roles and responsibilities are often successful and have fewer issues with attrition:

“When people don't know what they're doing, they think they're going to be made a fool of, they will certainly leave. Or, they'll get, the young people will get very angry. If they don't think we're structured enough, they'll just walk. They'll just walk.”

“So, we should be looking at that career—so basically growing, developing, educating, whatever, the person in that volunteer role—as we do with the role, because over time, the end result, the consumer of our service, be it the organisation itself, or be it the volunteer, people's expectations change and if we're growing their role.”

“So you can just see them trying and trying. And then they get there, then they do that... because they've got all the skills to assist all the other volunteers that don't know what to do ... it's really the career path that the [training] can set up for them, because it is a lot of work.”

A training facilitator mentioned that the reason it is important they do this is because:

“It's about having lunches for them or having functions where they can participate in and feel like they're part of a team, and I think that that's something that volunteers really appreciate.”

However, it does get mixed reviews from volunteers, some want training and mentoring while others are more reluctant to participate:

“When you try and put on workshops or training to up-skill people or if they want to join a committee and they need to go through certain training to join that committee, there's a very strong reluctance with mature age volunteers that have been there, done that and sick of doing it. But with the younger ones, they're pretty keen to do it, 'cause they want to up-skill themselves.”

“I offer training every three months. We offer training on all of those things [mental health, trauma and dementia]. I have the same 10 people out of 40 people turn up all the time so there are lots of reasons why these things happen. But I think, like you, it's the individual, their commitment.”

“Respect them enough to demand they come to the training and the organisations that do it very well expect the volunteers will turn up and they give the volunteers good quality training.”

As suggested by a manager of volunteers in emergency services volunteering area, there are many benefits to training volunteers for volunteer organisations; volunteers become more confident and more willing to do things the more training they do:

“The more I up-skill [volunteers], the more confident they are, the more they'll put their hand up to do things, and I love that because you just see them grow.”

4.4.1.3 Improving reporting and feedback

One strategy that is being adopted to improve the management of volunteers and meet the challenges of volunteer attrition is improving reporting and feedback. An organisation in the disability sphere has just adopted volunteering as part of its strategic plan. It is too early to tell whether incorporating volunteering into the organisation's key performance indicators will be a successful approach to avoiding dissonance between staff and volunteers and reducing attrition. This approach did raise groans of jealousy from those working in other organisations:

"We just did our strategic plan and one of only four key areas is volunteering so each manager or coordinator does their performance appraisal. They get measured on their commitment to volunteering [groans of jealousy]. It's only just happened so it's been really interesting. It's the big picture so each manager gets judged on how they manage or deal with volunteers."

Another manager of volunteers who works in community services found that the pre-existing three monthly surveys didn't pick up issues in a timely fashion to allow her to address those issues before they became a major problem, so she increased the frequency of the feedback she receives to monthly and has had positive results:

"Three months, I found out they've done two visits and never went back, and you're making the assumption that this person is being visited, and there's no one. So I make it every month so the maximum they can miss out on is a month."

The manager of volunteers in natural resource manager agreed, mentioning he, too, needed to make more frequent interactions to build trust and relationships with his volunteers:

“I agree with that wholeheartedly, increasing the time that you spend with those teams and those volunteers, even if it's just dropping in for half an hour to see how they're going with their project and making it clear that they've got the ownership and they need to communicate.”

Improving communication channels and building relationships appeared to be a strong theme. A community services-based manager of volunteers who works across a broad area of the Hunter region discovered this had not been done well in the past:

“When I first started and when I went to make sure our files are up to date, I opened a file and there was nothing there. I also had the OHS officer saying we need to have this or else we will get in trouble.”

This is probably a result of the attitude ‘don’t worry, they are just volunteers’ or ‘I don’t need to do that, I’m just a volunteer’ that is pervasive amongst old volunteer organisations:

“I think that the 20th century volunteering model, which arose from essentially church-based volunteering, where people were sort of ‘I’m a rusted on... ..volunteer,’ essentially, ‘You can do whatever you want to me because I’m going to get my reward in the next life.’ Well, I think people have rejected that totally.”

These out of date stereotypes and attitudes are not acceptable today, especially with a changing regulatory environment as pointed out by a project-based manager of volunteers:

“Now we have certain legal requirements. When it comes to our volunteers, we are legally responsible for managing these requirements.”

In some instances, it was demonstrated that the lack of proper reporting and feedback failures has led to reduced trust between the organisation and their volunteers:

“I asked for in-case-of-emergency details that would be kept on site, not in head office, in case an ambulance is called and they would look at me, ‘Why do you need this?’ Because if you start to die, I need to help you. There is a lot of suspicion.”

It was recognised by a manager of volunteers that strong organisational knowledge systems are essential to high quality volunteer management.

4.4.1.4 Organisational policies and procedures

Volunteer organisations are increasingly becoming aware that having good governance, good policies and good structures in place are beneficial to meeting the challenges attrition imposes on delivering successful volunteer programs. It is important that these policies and structures are flexible and continually improving within the changing volunteering environment. Key stakeholders believe that for volunteer management to move forward, it is important to ensure that good structures are in place and that they are reviewed on a regular basis:

“Good governance is around policy procedures. So that's funny, we kind of separate them but they're both responsible, because boards, governance and volunteers policy procedure... Good robust policy procedures, because that makes the service delivery of the organisation strong.”

“I think that volunteers and the policy around how they're managed is best polished and dealt with at the front line, not way, way further back. I think that it

needs to be the case that volunteers have the opportunity to respond in a sense to the needs of services.”

“Good policy procedures. From that whole phase, from the attracting to the retention to the maintenance of volunteers, because that to me is what makes a good organisation strong.”

A public servant with experience developing government policy in this area offers some advice for managers of volunteers developing their own policies;

“The more people are involved in the decisions about their work, the more you get a sort of close match between what they might contribute and what people really need, and that's where you get the greatest value out of their contribution.”

This inclusive approach goes a long way in developing trust with volunteers, which is an important factor in their intention to keep volunteering. In a family services organisation, they are actively incorporating volunteers in their decision making process:

“We have a volunteer on our advisory board. They are asked to give volunteers a voice and we meet regularly with our volunteers and this is just part of good management.”

It is important to continually review things because volunteering is a dynamic environment in which things are constantly changing. In natural resource management, volunteering group dynamics and structured teams change things:

“You throw a new volunteer in the mix or you take someone away from the mix, and suddenly you get this reforming of the group, because there's only ... There's a new hierarchy that needs to establish.”

4.4.1.5 Providing specific role descriptions for volunteers

Another way managers of volunteers are managing volunteer expectations, and as such attempting to reduce the attrition of volunteers, is through developing specific position descriptions, introducing memorandums of understanding, and creating volunteer contracts:

“I think as an organisation, we have to have roles and we need to sort of have that because there are specific roles that we do ask our volunteers to help us with, and that's fine.”

“Where I was managing, we had pretty clear guidelines based around equal employment opportunity versus things which are dictated, that you had to pull them up, same as you would for an employee, for a paid employee. So you just went through those processes of trying to correct any issues.”

“We have a minimum commitment of six months.”

“We do, too, about six months. If they don't want to, they don't sign up.”

There are a lot of challenges a manager of volunteers faces in day to day operations. There is a need to manage volunteer expectations and stakeholder expectations while also engaging with the community. Creating specific volunteer positions with job descriptions is one way of doing that. An example from a key stakeholder who trains volunteers tells how this is strategy is being implemented in the Hunter region:

“She [a manager of volunteers for a major event] has prepared volunteer roles, she has developed what her needs are, sorry, not her needs, the games' needs are. She has developed an orientation package that matches what the needs of the volunteers are compared to what jobs they would need to do. She has developed

policies, procedures in line with the local government on how we will roll out the volunteers and support them in their efforts to assist us. We're going to end up with a ... beautiful model of 600 volunteers who would know what they have to do, who will come each day and know what the expectations are, who will be uniformed, who will be part of a team, who will feel like they're part of something fantastic happening in Australia.”

4.4.1.6 Professionalism of volunteer management

There is a demand from volunteer organisations and regulators for improving the quality of volunteer management. There is also a demand from volunteers to get more out of their volunteer experience, but for this to happen, better volunteer management is needed:

“They want a little bit more out of their volunteering. That's why I don't think they're managed as well as they could [be].”

“We know that the volunteer, over time, changes and the volunteer's expectations change. Organizations ... I think, the pressures on the organisation have to rise to that challenge.”

“There are some simple formulas to being a good volunteer manager, but there are some tools that they need to be equipped with as well. And I think that once we have achieved that, the success falls into place.”

It was noted by a professional training facilitator that those people who are working in volunteer management often don't get the appropriate training they need to do the job:

“Organisations employ coordinators to coordinate their work and their volunteer times and hours and that, and usually those people are doing a great job. [But] I really believe that some of our volunteer managers are not properly trained to do the job. I don't think that they have a handle on the sort of systems they should have in place in terms of documentation or in terms of recognition and rewarding.”

4.4.1.7 Networking and professional development for managers of volunteers

One area that needs more work is around networking amongst managers of volunteers. When training managers of volunteers, the facilitator who participated in this research suggests this is essential to good volunteer management:

“Get into a network that really supports you and ask the questions.”

The concept that networking is a key component to volunteer management received positive support from public servants and local resource centres. They are particularly interested in networking as a way to share knowledge and increase the capacity of managers of volunteers:

“I think [networking is] a brilliant idea and I think that there's ... You don't have to develop a position description for each role from scratch, do you? There must be common elements. And I think that there's room for something like a knowledge clearing (House, House, & Mullady).”

“You get a lot of other information outside of [training] through the networking, talking to your colleagues, whether it be normal networking, it could be

mentoring, buddy system, whatever it might be, but you've got to have something come out of it, I think."

Managers of volunteers were open to networking as an opportunity to develop and increase their knowledge base.

"When I hear stuff, I go, 'That is really interesting,' and I have probably lived it but haven't really taken that in and it will be really useful to be able to discuss with other staff."

"I think that we need to use the tools that are available from other context to do that quality improvement and to continue its improvement."

Although they supported the idea of networking, some volunteer stakeholders were surprised that managers of volunteers don't already access this knowledge on their own:

"That's intriguing as well because the documentation around volunteer management is enormous. There is so much literature around good practice, we sometimes call it best practice and it outlines it very clearly."

The reason why it is not accessed as freely as some stakeholders expected was probably best described by a manager of volunteers in disability services:

"I think research would be really useful for us, too. I don't get the time to look it up (me, too) because if we understand what the research is telling us, we can use that, too."

4.4.1.8 Authentic recognition

Recognition of volunteer contributions is talked about a lot in volunteering strategies; while it isn't high on the priority list of why a volunteer is motivated to volunteer, or why they choose to continue to volunteer in a particular role, it is an important aspect to mitigating the challenge of volunteer attrition.

“ Thank you' isn't said enough to volunteers, because everyone's doing it for goodness of their heart, they're not doing it for recognition. When they do get it, they're very humble.”

“[Volunteer management is] not just paper work, it's about rewarding [volunteers] and appreciating them. And not just giving them a pat on the back and saying, 'Thanks so much.' It's about having lunches for them or having functions where they can participate in and feel like they're part of a team, and I think that that's something that volunteers really appreciate.”

As mentioned earlier, there are often mistakes on how the volunteer effort is recognised. Sometimes just a thank-you is enough and sometimes the stuff behind the scenes is missed. The manager of a volunteer resource centre mentioned this:

“We recognise the volunteer with the display of volunteering, of acting, of the character portrayal. But if we recognise that as a good job, we then have recognised that actor, the costume, the writers, the scenic photo ... was good as well.”

4.4.1.9 Reducing perceived impediments to volunteering

Many volunteers aren't big fans of bureaucracy in the workplace. As pointed out by a manager of volunteers in natural resource management:

"A lot of [volunteers] didn't necessarily want to understand the science behind the site, they just wanted to come in and be told what to do, have their hand held, be supervised and plod along and do whatever work it is that was set for them and go home."

This was supported by trainer of volunteers who mentioned that:

"A lot of volunteers I know, who I've spoken to, are sick of things like filling out paperwork all the time or, 'Why do we have to do this form, why do we have to do that for?' Really, all they wanna do is just volunteer."

Managers of volunteers all talked about how important the induction is and how much they put into it: *"It's all in the induction. We throw it all at them all at once."*

However, despite all the effort put into induction, the perception from volunteers that there is too much paperwork meant that they aren't getting through:

"But they sign everything. You explain everything at length and then they just go and do the wrong thing."

"I've always been very open in the advertisements, in the interview, in the induction, about being very clear that the role involves that kind of work and you have to know what to do. And they'll say, 'Yep. Yep, I know I can do that.' They'll

come in on the first day and it'll be like, 'How do I turn on the computer?' or ask those kind of things."

Most managers of volunteers believe there is a need to reduce the amount of time and paperwork that a volunteer needs to do before they begin volunteering but not many had a solution for it. They believe they already only did what they had to do. A trainer of volunteers made an interesting suggestion how this could be done:

"Could there be a central system where they could fill out paperwork online or something like that and they're classified, registered as a volunteer?"

4.4.1.10 Plans and strategies need to include time management

A common theme that kept arising throughout the research was that volunteers and managers of volunteers are time poor. This suggests that ensuring there is enough time available to maintain relationships with volunteers is a key challenge for volunteer organisations. The changing demands on volunteer time is changing the nature of volunteering and creating additional challenges for volunteer management:

"I think people do have busy lives and don't necessarily have that day or week to give, week in, week out."

"I really believe that most volunteer managers [are] time poor because they're given a range of responsibilities and if they are just managing volunteers, they're not given perhaps the admin assistance that they require."

Meeting these challenges is something that the manager of volunteers in disability services is looking to improve:

"I haven't prepared its (time management) what I can do better I can prepare for that."

It was agreed by other manager of volunteers that having to manage for the peaks and troughs, as well as the different needs of volunteers was a difficult volunteer management task that if not done well can have a negative impact on volunteer attrition.

“That’s right. it’s about planning for the peaks and troughs when recruiting [volunteers].”

“A lot of ‘em wanted to start early and finish early, which didn’t necessarily correspond with the hours of the staff.”

A lot of manager of volunteers demonstrated that dealing with university student volunteers and their regularly changing timetables can be an extremely difficult challenge:

“It’s really hard because their timetable changes and [they] want to stay in a program but we can’t change their days because it’s ‘Dave volunteers on this other day and he has been doing it for 25 years and can’t ask him to change.’ ”

“Uni exams are on. It’s like, ‘Where are all my volunteers gone?’ (laughter). And I don’t always hear from them. It’s hard.”

“Split up different uni students... for example, first year and second year that have different hours because they tend not to have placements or exams et cetera at the same time.”

These time pressures are not only an issue for university students but also volunteers of all different backgrounds. A manager of volunteers in community services shared her experience of dealing with the time pressures on her volunteers:

“Last fortnight (school holiday period), we had three people off because they’re mothers. They had no one else to mind their children so they had to have that time off. We have the older set. They go off and they travel.”

4.4.1.11 Increasing research opportunities around the changing nature of volunteering.

A volunteer resource centre manager indicated that another other area where further investigation and research is needed is around the changing nature of volunteering and how volunteering experiences are delivered:

“So, at the end of the day, volunteering should be a pathway from somewhere to somewhere else and it should be a pleasurable experience, where the organization gets something out of that relationship and the individual gets something out of that.”

This was supported by the strategic thinking of a senior public servant that informs government policy:

“It’s about how we manage people, how people self-manage in participation and how you manage groups of people in that sort of large participation world. I think the key to look for is that, technology-enabled participation, sometimes it’s volunteering.”

One of the ways participation could be managed was suggested by both a volunteer resource centre manager and a project-based manager of volunteers:

“If we can partner and reduce the cost [of volunteering]—and we know cost is important—but if we can, reduce the cost through partnership.”

In natural resource management volunteering, it was suggested that things are moving towards creating partnerships with individual volunteers, volunteer groups, corporate volunteering and other episodic volunteering experiences:

“I think your event days, like your Australia Day, your National Tree Days, Life Donor Days ... (chuckle) it doesn't matter what it is. Could be Visit a Home Care Day ... I think they're gonna become more dominant, in some respects.”

These episodic, short term and often self-managed volunteering opportunities, like timebanking, are really encouraged by those in government:

“People [are] managing themselves in their volunteer contributions and I think that increasingly that will cross over with participation. So, it's good to get off the couch. Sometimes that would be something I am doing for myself, some exercise.”

Managers of volunteers who offer technology-enabled volunteer roles believe that being able to volunteer remotely through the use of current and emerging technologies is something that could change how volunteering experiences are offered:

“I think more and more people would probably put their hand up to volunteer if more things were available to them that they can do from home.”

“I think there would be so many more people volunteering if they knew that there were more ways that you can volunteer other than just fronting up in person.”

However, managers of volunteers in community services were keen to point out that technology isn't the answer to everything and you still need some form of human contact for volunteer experiences:

“I think you'll always have the people who want, who crave, that personal interaction.”

Discussion

5 Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will discuss the themes that emerged from the results, how they relate to literature and what findings can be inferred by this research. Throughout this discussion, the research will explore and describe the perceptions of volunteer attrition by managers of volunteers in the Hunter region. The study of the impact and importance that attrition has on the success of volunteering organisations is complicated and fascinating. Managing volunteers and organisational expectations of volunteering programs is important to meet the challenges attrition presents. Volunteer organisations continually face financial constraints. Combine this with the changing volunteering environment, expectations of volunteers, and other stakeholders shifting the definition of what a volunteer career should look like, is changing how volunteer attrition can be managed. The dynamic nature of the volunteering sector will provide a rich area for researchers to investigate further. For practitioners and organisations designing volunteering activities, ensuring strong processes are in place and a positive organisation culture exists will play a role in ensuring the success and sustainability of volunteer programs. Strategies that are successfully being used by managers of volunteers in the Hunter region are diverse. The variety of volunteering opportunities, organisations and potential volunteers makes it clear that there isn't one single approach to managing volunteer attrition that can be rolled out across all volunteering organisations (Kenny, 2008). Nevertheless, to understand attrition management in volunteer organisations, it is important to understand the strategies being currently used to see what factors are perceived as the key to managing attrition in the future. These strategies are at times supported by strong volunteer management practices, organisational support and authentic recognition of volunteers. In the

Hunter region, there are some strategies and policies that are being implemented amongst the volunteering community at a regional level that are demonstrating improved attrition management.

5.2 Question 1 – What is the impact of volunteer attrition on the success of volunteer organisations?

This section discusses how the changing volunteer environment is creating organisations that are constantly adapting to these changing challenges, such as volunteers offering less time due to changing motivations for why and how people volunteer, external pressures, people being time-poor, changes in technologies and the increasing number of mutually obligated volunteers. As a result, many of the impacts of volunteer attrition are felt indirectly. The costs of a volunteer leaving are often felt through increased induction and training processes. These indirect impacts can also arise through the means by which a volunteer can provide their time, through the complexity of relationships and social networks, and through costs borne by volunteers. Therefore, volunteer attrition has been normalised for managers of volunteers and has become part of their ongoing operational responsibility. This makes it very difficult for managers of volunteers to identify the impacts that volunteer attrition has on the success of the organisation.

The environment in which volunteering occurs is changing and organisations choose to use fewer volunteers when the cost of volunteers is increased (Handy & Mook, 2011). These economic pressures on volunteering organisations have increasingly seen the need for more

capable, committed and trained volunteers, which has resulted in traditional unskilled volunteering in service-orientated organisations being less needed, particularly as they face an increase in regulations (Warburton & Cordingley, 2004). Increased regulation in areas such occupational health and safety, risk management and legal liability also have a direct impact on the volunteering effort and how it is organised (Warburton & Cordingley, 2004). According to managers of volunteers, these phenomenon described in the literature are being expressed by changing attitudes toward how people choose to volunteer, which in turn drives volunteer demand for changing how things are organised. For example, volunteers in the past were prepared to volunteer for eight hours straight; now it is unacceptable if the same activity is more than four hours long. Traditional volunteering, such as meals on wheels, is struggling to adapt as its volunteers age and need to be replaced.

The research suggests that the new generation of volunteers are choosier about the activities they will do and when they will do them (Kenny, 2008). This is exacerbated by volunteers being increasingly time poor; they are busy people and rely on flexibility and getting the most out of the short time they have (Holmes, 2009). Volunteers being time poor is something that impacts the volunteering organisation's ability to deliver their goods and services to clients. For example, the research demonstrated that when a volunteer who usually fulfils a certain role was otherwise occupied, the activities they normally fulfilled didn't get done. Time pressures and the need from volunteers for more flexible arrangements are resulting in volunteering becoming increasingly episodic (Snyder & Omoto, 2008). The research also mentioned that student volunteers who have limited time available would only volunteer for short periods of time, which supports the research that suggests a greater interest in episodic volunteering (Kenny, 2008).

Through the introduction of mutual obligation, student placement, or other mandatory volunteering, changes in the strategic directions of universities, industry accreditation groups and government policy directions, are having a profound effect on how people are choosing to volunteer and thus affecting the challenges faced by managing volunteers. The literature suggests that forcing people to volunteer reduces their intentions to volunteer again in the future (Stukas et al., 1999). Although it is incorporated alongside traditional volunteering activities, mandatory volunteering is further complicating the management challenges faced by managers of volunteers. Despite there being a significant debate on whether or not mandatory participation in volunteering activities should be considered volunteerism at all, managers of volunteers in this study are clearly struggling to accommodate mutual obligations placed on and by people who are applying to volunteer. One example given in the research demonstrated that if volunteers are required to do 60 hours, the organisation will only get them for 60 hours. The question is then whether it is worth training these people as volunteers or, if they need 400 hours over a short period of time, whether the volunteer organisation has enough work to accommodate them. The dissonance towards volunteering created by mutual obligations could be overcome by creating a sense of self-direction and choice (Stukas et al., 1999; Warburton & Smith, 2003). This generational transition from traditional long form volunteering, to a shorter, more episodic volunteering model is creating challenging management issues for volunteering organisations. For example, the preferred methods used to communicate, such as social media versus a handwritten letter, was pointed out by managers of volunteers as one such challenge.

Despite the fact that managers of volunteers don't identify volunteer attrition as a problem, it does have an impact on the success of the volunteer organisation. With the increase in

liability, managers of volunteers are being asked to be more professional, formalise volunteer tasks and follow a high level of recruitment, selection, training, management, policies for rewarding and retaining volunteers, all equivalent to that of managing employees (Handy & Hustinx, 2009). Inductions and ongoing training of volunteers are seen by managers of volunteers as the most costly activity for a volunteer program. With many volunteers not staying with the organisation longer than a few months, it can be disappointing and costly. The literature of volunteer retention has determined that the first six months is the period where the greatest loss of volunteers is likely to happen (Skoglund, 2006). This corresponds to the three-month estimate given by managers of volunteers as the average length of time the majority of volunteers recruited stay on; those who last longer usually become long term volunteers..

As demand for services continues to rise, volunteer organisations are under financial stress and facing lower or flat budgets so they need to be smarter in how they operate (Bruyere & Rappe, 2007). Managers of volunteers appear more distressed by the time costs than by the financial costs of high turnover rates. The literature is very clear in that a high rate of attrition is costly and leads to an inefficient use of resources (Warnick et al., 2012). Meanwhile, managers of volunteers are acutely aware of and believe in reducing bureaucratic red tape, as well as the length and complexity of inductions to engage volunteers more often. This is tempered by managers of volunteers being aware of the opportunity costs of keeping a particular volunteer when more capable volunteers may be available. An example given by managers of volunteers is that in technology-enabled volunteering, the effort of retaining a non-digital native can far outweigh the detrimental effect of having the organisation miss out on recruiting a more computer literate volunteer.

Volunteers are not simply replacements for paid staff; the roles need to be designed very differently to achieve appropriate outcomes (Bowman, 2004). It is important for volunteering organisations to understand, given tighter fiscal environments and an increased demand for services, that volunteers are not cheap labour. It is difficult to quantify the value of volunteers, and thus the cost of attrition, because it is ambiguous; the volunteer, the organisation, the beneficiary and the community can value their contributions differently (Bowman, 2004). Managers of volunteers mentioned several times throughout the research that volunteers sign up at higher rates after disasters or news items and that they want to play with children, or animals or help out after a disaster; however, this only makes up 1% of the activities undertaken in the roles available and by the time a volunteer is trained and positioned to perform these “good” activities they have lost motivation and moved on. But it is agreed on by both managers of volunteers in the Hunter region and in the literature that volunteering costs, money, time and opportunity:

“They apply, go through the process, then drop out and that can be expensive and time consuming.”

Costs are borne by the volunteer as well as the organisation, and these costs are not just lack of benefits (Wilson & Musick, 1999b). Managing the expectations of the organisation and those of volunteers appears to be a key role for managers of volunteers in managing attrition and ensuring a successful volunteer organisation.

As mentioned earlier, there is a school of thought in the literature that attrition is administratively uncontrollable (Claxton-Oldfield & Claxton-Oldfield, 2008). This seems to be supported by managers of volunteers who did not identify attrition as a major problem,

rather, just something that happens. This is in stark contrast to much of the literature, which suggests that managing attrition is critical to the success of volunteering organisations and that a large effort is needed to manage it (J. Garner & L. Garner, 2011; Millette & Gagné, 2008). Managers of volunteers in this study indicated that attrition is not a major issue for them, which is surprising given the literature. Attrition is a fact of life for volunteer organisations, and some volunteer turnover is unpreventable, but some attrition of volunteers is preventable (Snyder & Omoto, 2008). During the focus groups and in-depth interviews, participants were asked what they perceived as a good volunteering career. It indicated that what constituted a successful volunteer career varied significantly among volunteer organisations. Some suggested that a career lasting 12 months was a long term volunteer. How much effort was expected during that time also differed dramatically, such as the difference between four hours a month to significantly more than that. This is consistent with the rate in the literature, which states that a third of all people who register in a volunteer organisation leave before finishing one year and that the average length of time a volunteer contributes to an organisation is roughly 18 months (Hidalgo, 2009). These differences are representative of the diversity of the volunteer effort, which was also demonstrated by the differing attitudes towards attrition.

Turnover of volunteers is not always seen as a negative. The literature agrees that well-trained, habitual volunteers can undertake supervisory roles and mentor new volunteers (Haski-Leventhal & Cnaan, 2009). Being trusted encourages volunteers to trust more, building social capital and leading to higher rates of retention (Stukas et al., 2005). This approach was utilised by managers of volunteers particularly in natural resource management but they made it clear that it doesn't work for all volunteer activities, especially those that are seasonal and have noticeable peaks and troughs. Strong opinions were

expressed that short term episodic volunteering came in handy to manage these changes, especially around times of peak demand for services, such as at Christmas time. Many volunteer programs have a high turnover rate of volunteers, not due to a loss of motivation, but because they would feel more useful elsewhere (B. Robinson, 1994). Managers of volunteers mentioned that incorporating turnover into planning enabled them to reinvigorate their volunteer groups on regular basis. A large number of managers of volunteers also faced a problem with volunteer groups which had become exclusive or cliquy being detrimental to organisational objectives. This phenomenon was identified as a threat in the literature, in that some group behaviours can lead to social exclusion of new members, thus creating a subculture that can have a negative impact on the volunteering organisation (Haski-Leventhal & Cnaan, 2009). This appeared to be less of a challenge when the attrition of volunteers was built into the design of the volunteer experience. Managers of volunteers believed that attrition was not a problem, that it was more of a transition from an active volunteer to an ambassador or advocate for the volunteer organisation.

It is extremely difficult for a manager of volunteers to be aware of the impact that volunteer attrition has on the success of volunteer organisations. There is a school of thought amongst the managers of volunteers in this study that identified attrition as something that naturally happens in volunteering programs beyond the control of the manager of volunteers. The pressure to maintain levels of volunteers to avoid the interruption of service delivery means that managers of volunteers are often too consumed by the recruitment process. Consequently, many of the costs and impacts of volunteer attrition are not felt directly, such as not having enough volunteers to offer a service, but rather indirectly through increased training costs, lost opportunities or time. By not identifying the indirect impacts of attrition,

many managers of volunteers did not perceive it as a major issue. Being able to identify the impact and the relationship to attrition is made more difficult by the changing nature of volunteering. Increasing episodic volunteering, changing technology, shorter contributions to activities and the demand for recognition by volunteers for their efforts is altering how a successful volunteer career is defined, making it more difficult to measure attrition. As traditional volunteering is transforming, it is possible that there is a need for traditional volunteer management to also change.

5.3 Question 2 – Who is responsible for managing volunteer programs?

This section will discuss who is responsible for managing volunteers in the Hunter region, NSW, Australia, with particular focus on the skills of people who are asked to do the job and what skills the managers of volunteers believe they need, the roles and responsibilities they are tasked with and where they are located in the organisation. This is important because how well a volunteering experience is managed will affect whether a community's volunteer base is maintained and may impact the future availability of volunteers for activities within that community (Farrell, Johnston, & Twynam, 1998). The success of a volunteer program also relied on how volunteers are integrated into the organisation and the commitment to the organisation as a whole. Being able to retain volunteers is an important organisational outcome (Cuskelly et al., 2006), and achieving this requires respect for the volunteer effort from all stakeholders in the organisation; from the volunteer, the customers and the broader community. To understand how volunteers are being managed, it is important to understand who is responsible for managing for volunteers.

Managers of volunteers have many different titles but consistently they are the person responsible for the management of volunteer programs within an organisation. Managers of volunteers come from a variety of backgrounds to run a diverse range of volunteer programs. However, few of them actually have a human resources background; but mention that human resource management is a big part of what they do but were clear it doesn't cover everything they do.

Despite this, those who hired managers of volunteers didn't look for candidates with business skills, but rather, people with backgrounds in social services. They believe that understanding the complexity of human interactions is the most important background requirement. This may indicate that recruitment for managers of volunteers is lagging behind the changes in volunteering as external pressures are having significant impact on how volunteers are managed (Cuskelly et al., 2006). This could also have something to do with the need to create an environment of support to maintain their volunteer workforce (Shin, 2012). This conflict between these two contrasting skill sets, neither of which satisfies the requirements for being a manager of volunteers alone, is an issue for the quality of volunteer management. Managers of volunteers saw a need for improving professional development by increasing human resource management skills. Volunteer organisations that implement strategic human resource management demonstrate positive outcomes from doing so (Cuskelly et al., 2006). Offering increased professional development in strategic human resource management would be a popular and a positive move for volunteer management support organisations. The emergence of self-managed volunteering is consistent with high involvement management techniques which allow volunteers to be involved in their own management (Wood, Van Veldhoven, Croon, & de Menezes, 2012). The diversity of needs and experience among volunteers, for example, students who are at the start of their volunteering careers, volunteers who are mutually obligated to participate and are experiencing volunteering for the first time,

and those who have volunteered for many years, leads to mixed success for different management techniques.

Human resource management is recognised by managers of volunteers as a key skill requirement. Human resource management can assist with recruitment, volunteer selection, succession management, timetable flexibility, talent management and training (Yukl, 2008). While these are important to managing attrition, the volunteer experience itself is also important. Factors that build and improve the volunteer experience are work-life balance, benefits, socialisation programs, self-empowerment, recognition programs and training (Yukl, 2008). Many managers of volunteers felt they were employed based on their skills to manage the volunteer experience, but once in the role, they are expected to focus on the human resource management activities. Volunteers are sensitive to their efforts being worthwhile. Therefore, the volunteer experience is not just a human resource challenge for managers of volunteers as suggested by some volunteer stakeholders, but a responsibility for the whole organisation.

Many managers of volunteers pointed out that more paperwork and requirements are being placed on volunteers who had little desire or motivation to do it. While volunteers want some responsibility and self-determination, they are reluctant to take on administrative responsibilities (Henryks, 2011). As a result, much of this administration then falls to the managers of volunteers who are looking at other disciplines, such as human resource management, to reduce this additional administrative load. There is relatively little research on human resource management in volunteer organisations (Cuskelly et al., 2006), although evidence suggests that a lot of volunteer organisations draw heavily on business practices to manage volunteers (Barnes & Sharpe, 2009). Still, few managers of volunteers had the

resources to incorporate these business practices fully within their organisation (Cuskelly et al., 2006), thus, to achieve positive outcomes for an organisation, it is important to encourage innovation, collaboration and good decision making (du Plessis, 2005). This necessary innovation within volunteer organisations could be beneficial to human resource managers, offer an opportunity for further research and improve the respect for volunteers and the work they undertake.

Being able to manage the transition into the organisational culture is as important a skill for managers of volunteers as it is for student advisers who manage the experience of international students when integrating into a new culture (Arthur, 2003). To do this, a manager of volunteers must provide encouragement and a social support network for their volunteers that is supported by organisational specific training to help newcomers develop a better understanding of the organisation's culture (Yusliza, 2011). Managers of volunteers need to be aware that volunteers go through different stages of a volunteering career: when they learn to be a volunteer, are a volunteer, and when they transition from volunteering (Haski-Leventhal & Bargal, 2008). Socialisation of staff into an organisation's culture is a skill that is important in human resource management whether working with employees or volunteers. By adopting human resource practices, managers of volunteers can improve the organisational support for volunteers and improve the volunteer's attachment to the organisation (Wimbush, 2005). Managing attrition, however, is more than just managing volunteer perceptions; it is about transitioning volunteers to become ambassadors. However, to do that successfully, the manager of volunteers needs to help minimise the issues volunteers face when they stop volunteering, which are similar to the dissonance felt by international students when they return home (Arthur, 2003). When managing the transition

of volunteers to organisational ambassadors, it is important to shape the expectations of the volunteers, the organisation and their communities. Each manager of volunteers relies heavily on the support of their organisation for the success of volunteer programs.

Managers of volunteers clearly revealed during this research that many people within their organisations don't respect the inputs volunteers give to their organisations. This was demonstrated by a request for a volunteer to clean toilet chairs that was received by one manager of volunteers. But respect needs to go both ways; the organisation needs to be respected by volunteers, too. For example, volunteers not giving an organisation appropriate notice of intention to leave is a regular issue for managers of volunteers. This lack of notice reduces the manager's ability to strategically plan the succession of a volunteer and ensure the organisation's ability to deliver services to clients. This lack of respect is not just between the organisation and volunteer but between volunteers as well. Communication is the key to reducing attrition and improving organisational performance (B. B. S. Dhebar, Benjamin 2008). It is important for volunteer organisations to respect volunteers by keeping them informed. This builds a culture of respect within the organisation. One of the key benefits of volunteering is the development of social capital through communication because it builds trust and encourages reciprocity (Stukas et al., 2005). Without a respectful culture, it is difficult to create trust. This social capital allows an organisation to access the external information, support and resources that allow them to be successful (Cramb, 2007). A strong culture includes shared values, beliefs, mission and purpose and importantly, how others in the organisation are treated (Yukl, 2008). Socialisation into a strong organisational culture is important in terms of attrition management because a high turnover creates inconsistency in the quality of service provided amongst other things, such as loss of institutional memory (Tang, Liu, Oh, & Weitz, 2014). This socialisation can assist in managing expectations through participation in activities, which can act as a gateway to further volunteering

activities (Paik & Navarre-Jackson, 2011). Once a strong culture exists in an organisation, it reinforces the objectives of the organisation and reduces the mismatch in expectations between by volunteers and employees.

The development and maintenance of a strong organisational culture is the responsibility of the whole organisation when it decides to incorporate volunteering into their operations. A strong organisational culture is important for the success of volunteer programs (Yukl, 2008). Some individuals in organisations see volunteers as an opportunity to get cheap labour and to do the jobs they don't want to do. With external pressures to reduce costs further and do more with less, it is important that volunteers are not seen as a way to reduce costs. This can be extended to the broader community as well. Volunteering improves social capital, which develops connectedness, groups, social networks, trust and reciprocity within a community (R. A. Stebbins, 1996). To achieve this, it is important to integrate successful volunteer practices across the whole organisation, and improve communication and collaboration between volunteers and employees. This is essential to reducing the attrition of volunteers and providing a positive volunteering experience.

5.4 Question 3 – What specific attrition management strategies are employed by managers and what is their effectiveness?

The perception that volunteer attrition is not having a major impact on an organisation does not mean that manager of volunteers are not actively managing attrition. Knowing what attrition management strategies are being used is critical in understanding volunteer attrition from the perspective of managers of volunteers. There is no doubt that volunteering is changing significantly for a variety of reasons. These changes may see the erosion of a large

number of traditional volunteer positions (Warburton & Cordingley, 2004). The emergence of new technologies, such as online volunteering, can offer new opportunities for volunteers and new challenges for managers of volunteers (B. B. Dhebar & Stokes, 2008). Self-managed volunteering is another emerging form of volunteering; for example, the rapidly growing timebanking phenomenon (Communities, 2013) is challenging traditional volunteer management techniques, particularly in relations to volunteer attrition. It is important in a changing environment that managers of volunteers don't insist on taking a given approach simply because things have always been done that way. Attrition is mitigated in several ways. Firstly, communication with volunteers must improve so they know what's happening rather instead of reacting to issues. This can be accomplished by reducing impediments to volunteering or adjusting programs to deal with the different volunteer time requirements. Managers of volunteers employ strategies to encourage volunteer ownership of a program by providing specific roles, empowering volunteers and acknowledging the volunteer's contributions to the success of the organisation. Other more strategic options for reducing volunteer attrition could include implementing programs that improve the training and mentoring of volunteers and improve the professionalism of those managing volunteer programs. The external pressures on volunteer organisations can influence how a volunteer organisation manages attrition.

Managers of volunteers reported that they now face more requirements that require them to improve reporting and feedback (Bruyere & Rappe, 2007). This has a positive impact on attrition management because currently understanding the impact of attrition on a volunteer organisation is not easy; volunteer organisations rarely keep such information (Osborn, 2008). The creation and improvement of tools to report and provide feedback are useful for managers of volunteers to understand the motivations and goals of their volunteers, and thus

enable them to better manage the volunteer experience (Silverberg, Marshall, & Ellis, 2001). Building relationships with volunteers generates reciprocity, which leads to achieving outcomes for the volunteer organisation and build social capital (Stukas et al., 2005). This is important because volunteer attrition is related to the relationship between volunteers and their managers, and how much they encouraged participation, offer choices and listen to the volunteers (Millette & Gagné, 2008). Feedback is not only about providing information to the organisation; it also involves going back to volunteers to let them know how their work contributes to the organisation's objectives (Millette & Gagné, 2008). Managers of volunteers need to be aware of the changing motivations of volunteers and therefore the needs of volunteers (Osborn, 2008). While this isn't specifically a strategy for managing volunteer attrition, it is seen by managers of volunteers as a priority for improving the quality of volunteer management.

It is clear from this research that managers of volunteers are experiencing significant changes to the nature of volunteering. Traditional volunteer management systems for attracting, retaining and managing volunteers are based on inadequate measures (Warner et al., 2011). Those who work on government policy expressed an opinion that policy around how volunteers are managed is best developed by managers of volunteers with their volunteers. To provide specific roles for volunteers, it is important that there be robust policies and procedures behind them to support and protect volunteers. The more volunteers are involved in the decision making process, the more the volunteer experience will match their expectations and as a result the volunteer program will get the greatest contribution from their volunteers.

Participants made it clear that volunteer organisations are currently faced with a tight fiscal environment and are being told they need to be more efficient. Efficiency can sometimes be confused for cost cutting, but efficiency isn't about cutting resources; it's about getting more out of available resources. Managers of volunteers have made it clear that to get the most out of a volunteer, it is important to make them feel their contribution is valued (Osborn, 2008). It is also important that effort is taken to record procedures and capture knowledge. It is acknowledged that a weak organisational culture can develop when policies and procedures are inconsistent and poor work practices result (Schneider et al., 2013). It is clear from discussions with managers of volunteers that much of volunteer management strategies have been relatively informal, often not written down and as a result a lot of time and effort is spent reinventing the wheel. What can be taken from this research is that at a regional level, managers of volunteers need to drive the development of innovative and efficient strategies to improve volunteer management practices. Some feedback that managers of volunteers are reacting to includes the length and complexity of volunteer induction processes, the amount of paperwork, and time management issues which discourage volunteers from participating in the program.

Managers of volunteers were keen to reduce the length and complexity of the orientation process as they saw it as an impediment to volunteering. They were also keen to investigate new ways of volunteering, such as online volunteering. A common barrier to volunteering brought up in the literature and supported by the managers of volunteers was the staff-volunteer conflict. Staff-volunteer relationships can be complex and many do not believe that volunteers should be relied on to do what staff could do (Vinton, 2012). Often, staff can become a barrier to volunteering by creating unofficial demarcation of tasks. In terms of attrition management, health was a frequent factor reported as a barrier to continuing

volunteering (Caro & Bass, 1997). Managers of volunteers noted that they are forced to deal with high levels of mental health issues amongst volunteers. While people's health is out of the control of managers of volunteers, it is important to design volunteer roles that suit a variety of capabilities, including online options. While there has been a lot of research into what motivates people to volunteer or into resolving staff-volunteer conflicts, there is very little research into what barriers influence people's decision not to volunteer in the first place.

Managers of volunteers kept bringing up their experiences with university students. Those experiences informed the study of a growing issue with volunteers being increasingly time poor. Time is something that managers of volunteers mentioned as having a big impact on volunteering in other areas. University students were seen to have a positive impact on the volunteering organisation within which they were volunteering. These students have broad range of skills to offer groups and organisations, and it is also hoped that they will continue volunteerism after graduation (McCabe, White, & Obst, 2007). But time is not only an issue for students, it is also a key factor in determining how often people who are employed volunteer. It appears that part-time workers tend to volunteer more than full-time workers (Measham & Barnett, 2008). It is not just the volunteer's time that is limited; managers of volunteers are often the first and last point of contact for all volunteering programs within a volunteering organisation, putting pressure on their time and abilities. Traditional areas of volunteering are most affected by the new regulatory environment, such as health and safety, or risk management processes (Warburton & Cordingley, 2004). It is not be unreasonable to suggest that increased organisational support for volunteers is required to improve their time management and make them more willing to sacrifice what time they have. This can be

achieved by adopting strategies that increase a volunteer's commitment to volunteering, such as increasing volunteer ownership of the volunteer program in which they are participating.

One strategy that is used to manage expectations and allow volunteers to take ownership of their roles and activity they participate in is to develop specific role descriptions for volunteers. Developing specific volunteer roles can create interest and enjoyment in the activity (Millette & Gagné, 2008). There are specific segments within the volunteer community that have different behaviours (Dolnicar & Randle, 2007); therefore, to achieve the desired outcomes for the organisation, these roles and activities need to be carefully designed with consideration for the differences in volunteer motivation (Stukas et al., 2005) because volunteers with roles and activities that match their motivations are less likely to stop volunteering (Okun, 1994), and requires a lot of skill and effort from managers of volunteers to be successful.

This process can be complemented by using other strategies that allow volunteers to be an integral part of achieving the organisations goals and objectives. A popular strategy employed by volunteer organisations is empowering volunteers by giving them ownership of their task. S-managed autonomous teams and allowing volunteers to build relationships with both internal and external stakeholders increase task significance and improve retention of volunteers (Millette & Gagné, 2008). This approach is not uncommon amongst grassroots, welfare-based volunteer organisations that need to maximise volunteer input and control (Milligan & Fyfe, 2005). This is considered a successful approach by managers of volunteers. The literature suggests that a volunteer organisation's role is to facilitate the activity, not manage the activity (Kenny, 2008). This is also an important concept for

volunteer programs that see volunteering as a transition into the workforce. When participating in a volunteer role, individuals can learn to play roles within an organisation (Wilson & Musick, 1999a). This gives them confidence and makes them more employable, which is important for retaining volunteers and requires building attachments to the host organisation (Hustinx & Handy, 2009). Organisational commitment is believed to be developed through exposure to organisational activities and policies, and is enhanced by volunteers taking on leadership roles (Hartenian & Lilly, 2009). It is based on the theory that volunteers who feel valued become motivated and easier to retain (Cordery & Narraway, 2010). This integration also allows for improved, professional development opportunities for both volunteers and employees. It also means that it is easier to informally recognise the contribution volunteers make to the organisation's outcomes.

Recognition is talked about a lot in government strategies, such as the NSW volunteering strategy (Communities, 2013). It is seen by many as good practice for managers of volunteers but managers of volunteers pointed out that it isn't always about the big celebration and awards ceremony, it is sometimes about just saying 'thank you.' There is support in the literature for this, which indicates the importance of the job volunteers do raises their pride in the organisation (J. T. Garner & L. T. Garner, 2011), because volunteers are more likely to be motivated when they know their effort is valued by the organisation (Cordery & Narraway, 2010). Strong recognition programs are often a key motivation for volunteers to continue volunteering (Hoey, Abell, & Reading, 2007). While a simple 'thank you' is important to volunteers, they also appreciate an annual event to recognise the efforts they spend volunteering (Hoey et al., 2007). Managers of volunteers suggest that because volunteers are humble and can be embarrassed at a big event, it's an opportunity to reward the job and thus

acknowledge all the individuals it took to do it and show the organisation's appreciation. The literature confirms that volunteers, like managers of volunteers, believe participation in such functions is important because it allows them to be part of the team by providing an opportunity to meet and socialise with other volunteers and employees (Hoey et al., 2007). These functions also allow for the interaction between volunteers at different stages of their volunteer careers, which can help with the socialisation of new volunteers.

The importance of supporting a volunteer program with training and mentoring opportunities is sometimes overlooked by some volunteer organisations, while others have a training culture that involves consistently upskilling and mentoring their volunteers. This is a popular technique with a lot of emergency services and sport-based volunteering organisations. If a volunteer perceives value in the training and mentoring, it increases their attachment to volunteering (Wilson & Musick, 1999a). The participants' responses supported previous studies which suggested that younger volunteers, more so than older volunteers, see volunteering as an opportunity to learn or develop new skills (Webber, 2011). Being offered and having a choice to improve their skills is important to retaining volunteers (Millette & Gagné, 2008); participants also confirmed that volunteers who are obligated to participate often feel exploited and this reduces the volunteer's desire to participate again in the future (Warburton & Smith, 2003). The literature suggested younger volunteers enjoy learning through activities more so than learning from another person, thus training in a classroom is less successful in encouraging people to continue volunteering (Webber, 2011). However, managers of volunteers who participated in this research believed that when using this strategy, it is important that the same training isn't offered all the time; the training must evolve with the volunteer's experience (Yin-Che et al., 2010). Training offered together with the experience to practice what they have learned through volunteering is a strong pathway

into employment (Leong, 2008). It is important to note that training is not a magic bullet, and in some situations, it would not enhance volunteer retention (Yin-Che et al., 2010). This strategy worked best for participants with younger volunteers than with retirees, who managers of volunteers revealed were more reluctant to attend regular training. According to those managing of volunteers, convincing volunteers of the value to them of attending training is an important part of managing the volunteer's experience and reducing injury, frustration and conflict amongst volunteers.

Many stakeholders, including volunteers, acknowledged that the key to improving the volunteer experience is to ensure that it is well managed. This is important in relation to attrition management because a common reason that volunteers give for discontinuing their volunteering is bad management (Osborn, 2008). Managers of volunteers suggested that with so few quality volunteer management courses available, they get inadequate opportunities for training. This is remarkable since much of the research into volunteering suggest that high quality volunteer management is essential to successful volunteer programs (Vinton, 2012). Given the importance of volunteer management, volunteer organisations that are serious about dealing with volunteer attrition should be prepared to invest in professional development for their managers of volunteers.

Keeping volunteers committed to the organisation's goals and mission is key to volunteer organisations (Neininger, Lehmann-Willenbrock, Kauffeld, & Henschel, 2010); it is therefore safe to assume that commitment is a key factor in mitigating volunteer attrition. Volunteer organisations in a tight economic environment are always looking for ways to cut costs. Often, when implementing cost cutting measures, volunteer management is seen as an easy

target for savings. However, organisations should be aware that a well-managed volunteer program can help avoid cuts to programs valued by clients (Vinton, 2012). These programs are valued not only by the clients but by the volunteers and keeping them when budgets are tight has a big impact on the commitment of volunteers. This suggests that strategically investing in the professional development and networking opportunities for managers of volunteers would be beneficial for volunteer organisations. A clear example of the benefits networking has for managers of volunteers was brought up during the focus group. In one discussion, a manager of volunteers mentioned an issue around university timetables; they were struggling to manage when large numbers of student volunteers at short notice become unavailable due to placement or exams. Another manager of volunteers from a separate organisation on the focus group offered a solution she had used. This interaction and ability to build knowledge through interaction between managers of volunteers has had a positive effect in the Hunter region, NSW, Australia, and should be further supported.

There are a variety of strategies being implemented across the Hunter region, NSW, Australia, to meet the challenge of volunteer attrition. It is clear that no individual strategy is a one-size-fits-all solution to volunteer attrition but there are some key strategies that are being effectively and successfully implemented in the Hunter region, NSW, Australia. It is important for managers of volunteers to understand that volunteers are not just a source of labour and that they have their own motivations for participating in a volunteer program (Measham & Barnett, 2008). Volunteers are a diverse group with many different motivations that can change over time so it's important that managers of volunteers choose the right strategies to combat volunteer attrition.

Conclusion

6 Conclusion

6.1 Implication for managers of volunteers

Volunteer management practitioners can take from this research that while attrition does not appear to directly affect the success of volunteer organisations, volunteer attrition does have a massive indirect impact on the success of the volunteering organisations. This research has found that attrition has a big impact on volunteer organisations; some of it is negative and some of it is positive, despite the acknowledgement of the importance of attrition management to the success of volunteer organisations by managers of volunteers. Managing the expectations of volunteer organisations and volunteers is a key strategy for managers of volunteers trying to meet the challenge of volunteer attrition. Volunteer attrition management is important to the success of volunteer organisations because it impacts the experiences of volunteers, whether they be traditional volunteer roles or episodic volunteer roles. Volunteer attrition does have an indirect impact because managers of volunteers incorporate the expectation of attrition into their planning. The theory of a volunteer life cycle, recruiting, retaining and attrition of volunteers (Omoto, Snyder, & Martino, 2000) based around an individual organisation is changing towards one based around a community that needs to be managed so that it's available for future volunteering opportunities. Volunteers no longer want to stay in a particular role, which has seen volunteers regularly transition from one volunteer experience to another. This works with an emerging theme amongst managers of volunteers to turn former volunteers into ambassadors or advocates for their organisation. This study suggest that attrition management in an evolving volunteer environment is not about reducing the rate of attrition, but about managing the transition of volunteers from one contribution to another.

Many volunteer organisations claim that while they are responsible for their volunteer programs, they see it as a collaboration with volunteers (Barnes & Sharpe, 2009). That said, often the whole responsibility for collaboration is left to the manager of volunteers to develop and implement. Siloing or compartmentalising a volunteer program removes the volunteer effort from the rest of the organisation, creating separate organisational cultures between employees and volunteers, thereby pulling them in different directions. Successful volunteering programs are not the responsibility of one person; they are a part of the entire organisation's culture. For the organisation, the objective of an effective volunteer program is one that can be repeated and happen without unnecessary delays, errors and accidents (Yukl, 2008). This requires robust organisational processes and the valuable feedback which those volunteers can provide. This further emphasises the importance of integration between volunteers and paid staff (J. T. Garner & L. T. Garner, 2011). This integration is important because the acquisition and retention of quality volunteers and staff has a strong impact on the success of any organisation that has volunteers (Yukl, 2008). To retain volunteers, an organisation needs to deal with the culture shock or mismatch between volunteer expectations and reality. This can be done by managing the transition of perceptions, knowledge and emotions of volunteers into the organisation (Haski-Leventhal & Bargal, 2008). This means the initial orientation and socialisation when joining an organisation is significant in increasing commitment, reducing turnover and managing costs (Tang et al., 2014). Managers of volunteers noticed a significant mismatch in expectations of both the organisation and the volunteer.

To get the most out of each volunteer contribution, it is important to adopt a strategy to empower volunteers. Most managers of volunteers agreed that treating volunteers like staff was a successful strategy to implement. Another strategy that is becoming popular is the implementation of specific role descriptions for all volunteers. Not all best practice activities

used by managers in human resources are useful in volunteer organisations (Cuskelly et al., 2006); however, providing role descriptions for volunteers can have positive results. This requires highly capable managers of volunteers who have a range of skills and experience. Volunteers often leave due to poor volunteer management, therefore providing the professional development of the managers of volunteers is a key to the strategic plan of any volunteering organisation.

A successful strategy that is often used to meet the challenge of attrition is the implementation of a training program. Whilst there is some training that is unavoidable due to external rules and regulations, further training and upskilling isn't a strategy available to all volunteers. It is, however, something that should be offered as a choice to meet the needs of volunteers (Warburton & Smith, 2003). To avoid neglect, managers of volunteers must ensure the content of the training program evolves to help maintain the interest of volunteers. Incorporating choice and regular change increases volunteer respect for the organisation and improves the organisation's chances for retaining them (J. T. Garner & L. T. Garner, 2011). Giving volunteers a choice enables volunteers to feel empowered and involved in their work. This crossover also makes the point that no strategy for dealing with volunteer attrition should be considered a standalone fix and instead should be a part of a broader volunteer management strategy.

It is well known that the recognition of volunteers is important to all volunteers and the organisation they work for. It is important that managers of volunteers understand that this is an ongoing activity not limited to once a year. A simple thank you is just as effective to the retention of volunteers (J. Garner & L. Garner, 2011) Because volunteers need to feel appreciated and valued (Osborn, 2008). A strong relationship between the manager of volunteers and their volunteers is essential to the ongoing recognition of the volunteer's contribution to the organisation, and mitigate volunteer attrition.

Managing the expectations of volunteers and their organisations is a key responsibility of volunteer management when addressing meeting the challenge of volunteer attrition. To do this, managers of volunteers need a range of skills and knowledge similar to those with social services or human resource management backgrounds, complemented by other skills training such as project management skills, inter-cultural transition management and counselling. This idea was reinforced by managers of volunteers who indicated that they would like to see training in mental health, first aid, networking and communications. It is necessary that everyone know they share the same organisational objectives, mission and values, and to do this a volunteer organisation needs great communication and a strategic, innovative and respectful culture.

6.2 Implications for further research

While many managers of volunteers look towards business for solutions to the challenges faced by volunteer organisations, it is easy to forget that not all business concepts translate to volunteering (J. T. Garner & L. T. Garner, 2011) and researchers should be prepared to look more broadly for solutions. This qualitative research was limited to managers of volunteers in the Hunter region, NSW, Australia, and cannot claim to be representative of the broader experience of managers of volunteers (O'Neill, 2001). It does indicate that managers of volunteers are keen to build the knowledge base for volunteer management, and that having a better understanding of the consequences of choosing different strategies and options is something that they value highly. One thing that emerged from both the interviews and

literature is that attrition and the reasons for it are not well measured (Nkonki et al., 2011). As a result, managers of volunteers search for ways to improve their procedures.

It became apparent throughout the research that there is a need for volunteer resource management systems. Managers of volunteer appear to rely on simple measures such as hours contributed and sign-in sheets to manage volunteers. The evolving nature of the volunteering environment is making the management of volunteers more complex, meaning there will be increasing demand for better information about the volunteering cohort. This suggests that reporting and feedback is one area that demands further research to provide practical ways for managers of volunteers to measure volunteer engagement and satisfaction. With volunteering so pervasive within our community and culture, volunteerism will continue to be a rich area for researchers.

With volunteering becoming increasingly organised around the volunteer and not the activity, the accessibility of volunteers and managers of volunteers for researchers will also change. This will have implications for research in the design of research projects. The number of people captured through mandatory volunteering policies incorporated into volunteering communities may also be an area to consider. Participants in this research were adamant that those who didn't want to be there were having an adverse effect on the volunteering effort. This is something that may affect the results of volunteer research or could be an opportunity for future research.

6.2.1 Limitations

When considering this research, it is important to note that it was possibly affected by some limitations. As a general rule, the results of this study cannot be generalised across the

broader community due to the inclusive bias from employing a convenience sample. Therefore, this research does not try to speak for managers of volunteers in the broader sense but these particular practitioners at this point in time. The biggest limitation for this study is the small sample size that participated in this research, which may have restricted the ability to generalise the results of this research. The availability of participants was difficult to overcome and may bias the results towards organisations that involve more professional volunteer programs. It is possible that micro-volunteering organisations have a different perspective on how to manage volunteer attrition. The restricted timeframe in which this research was conducted may have also limited the research capacity, particularly by restricting the sample size. The small sample size was not seen as a major problem because the research uncovered a lot of rich data and additional participants may not have added to the theoretic saturation. Focus groups used in this research provided a rich source of data which allowed the researcher to dig into the topic to some depth but may have limited the data due to the lack of diversity of participants. There was a significant amount of very rich data that was collected; the analytical interpretation of this data and themes may have been biased by the fact the researcher has some experience as a manager of volunteers. This aided in creating a rapport with participants that allowed managers of volunteers to open up, providing rich data for the study. The nature of self-reporting may affect the outcomes of the research. This is always a possibility in focus groups with participants from one particular discipline; in this case, managers of volunteers faced issues that can be attributed to volunteers or other staff rather than to managers of volunteers. Being aware of these possible limitations to the research does not reduce the value of this study. In an attempt to avoid the limitations, one of the focus groups was held in conjunction with an existing networking event which made it more desirable; however, additional time requirements made it more difficult for managers of volunteers to find the time to attend. Therefore, the stand alone

focus group was more successful. Managers of volunteers also responded to direct invitation more favourably than as part of a general invitation; they liked to feel their opinion was desired.

6.3 Conclusion

This research has attempted to better comprehend the nature and impact of volunteer attrition from the perspective of managers of volunteers in the Hunter region. It has identified that attrition impacts the success of volunteer programs indirectly, creating a perception amongst managers of volunteers that volunteer attrition is normal. Managers of volunteers come from a diverse range of backgrounds and are managing a large variety of volunteer programs that attract different volunteers, each with their own motivations for contributing to a volunteer program. As a result. It is difficult to measure the full impact that attrition has on volunteering programs. This is further complicated by the changing nature of volunteering. This means that there is a need for a flexible approach to managing attrition in volunteer organisations and to do this successfully. This research has discovered a variety of strategies that have been successfully implemented by managers of volunteers in the Hunter region.

The key to good volunteer attrition management includes a broad-based respect for the volunteer and managers of volunteers, combined with flexible approaches to volunteer management such as incorporating transition management techniques to handle the increase in episodic volunteers. As attitudes toward volunteering change and individuals become more selective of the volunteering opportunities they accept, there is a need to look beyond human resource management techniques to find solutions. Some effective strategies that are being

employed by managers of volunteers, such as treating volunteers as staff, empowering volunteers and giving authentic recognition, are important and require strong relationship skills amongst managers of volunteers. In conclusion, the nature of volunteer attrition is a complicated challenge. How it is currently managed has been informed by research from a volunteer's perspective on motivation to volunteer; therefore, the majority of volunteer management practices to mitigate attrition focuses on improving recruitment and the orientation of volunteers as opposed to addressing attrition directly. This research demonstrates that volunteer attrition does impact the success of volunteering organisations, making attrition management an important management technique that impacts the success of volunteer organisations.

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7 Reference List

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Appendix

8 Appendices

8.1 Appendix 1 – Schedule for Focus Groups

Does attrition have an impact on the success of your organisation? How does the challenge of dealing with the turnover of the volunteer cohort affect your ability to meet your obligations to the organisation and to your volunteers? Does the turnover of volunteers affect how you manage your volunteers?

Does your organisation have a program aimed specifically at retaining volunteers? Through what methods do you attempt to avoid the attrition of volunteers? What other options have you explored? Why have you settled on your current plan? Are there other programs and activities you would like to implement to avoid attrition?

What support do you get to manage volunteer attrition? How effective is this support for your retention program? What else could be done to support your volunteer retention efforts?

What skills and traits should someone in a similar position to you have? What support do you need to run a successful volunteer program?

8.2 Appendix 2 – Schedule for Interviews

Does attrition have an impact on the success of your organisation? Many managers of volunteers mentioned they didn't believe attrition had a major impact on the success of volunteer organisations.

What methods, from your perspective, are most successful to avoiding the attrition of volunteers? Managers of volunteer believe that volunteers are volunteering for shorter periods of time. How do you believe this will change the sector? Are there any programs and activities you would like to implement to minimise attrition?

What role do you believe your organisation should play in managing the attrition of volunteers? Many managers of volunteers felt that employees are fair weather supporters of volunteer programs and do not respect the contribution of volunteers to their organisation. What are your thoughts?

What skills and traits should a manager of volunteers have? What support is needed to run a successful volunteer program? Managers of volunteer have suggested mental health first aid and human resources management as areas in which they could use extra training. What are your thoughts?