Research

ABSTRACT

In New Zealand, the social contribution of volunteers exceeds 270 million hours per year. Volunteer participation is a vital component of emergency services activities, particularly in rural settings. Fire and Emergency New Zealand is the primary rural emergency response agency with a network encompassing almost 3500 volunteers. This 'formal' volunteer capacity aids the wellbeing of communities, particularly in response to wildfire, but also other hazards. Formal organisation of volunteers is supplemented by informal volunteering, especially during response and recovery phases and is increasingly encouraged in readiness and reduction activities. Informal volunteering, evident in the 'spontaneous' mobilisation of resources during disasters, can evolve into more formal structures. Governments and volunteer organisations are being urged to plan for 'spontaneous' and 'digital' volunteers as part of their emergency preparedness to include volunteers in ways where formal and informal volunteering can work together. This paper considers the practical aspects of integrating informal and formal volunteers to identify lessons for inclusion. The papers examines how informal volunteer activities could contribute more to rural community resilience before, during and after emergency events.

Integrating volunteering cultures in New Zealand's multi-hazard environment

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Introduction

Volunteering increasingly attracts interest from governments in their recognition of the role volunteers play in the community as well as the voice of change. Volunteers champion causes for the benefit of civil society that may otherwise be neglected or unattended by the public sector (United Nations 2012). The role of volunteers spans many aspects of social, health and emergency service to communities. These include supporting vulnerable people in crisis or hazardous situations (e.g. Red Cross, State Emergency Services in Australia) as well as protecting endangered species and habitats from ecological destruction and environmental harm (e.g. Conservation Volunteers, Greenpeace, Environmental Defence Society in New Zealand). With the increasing number of extreme events accompanying changes in climate, including more severe storms, frequent and intense cyclonic events, flooding and wildfires (Aldunce *et al.* 2015), there is increased need for volunteers during emergency situations (Brennan, Flint & Barnett 2005, O'Brien 2008).

Within this context, there is a need for volunteer participation in readiness and reduction activities; not just response and recovery. Governments recognise the importance of volunteers in general and encourage volunteer services where resources are limited. Evidence shows that some governments offer incentives to support volunteer activities and organisations (Department of Internal Affairs n.d., Emergency Management Victoria 2015). Volunteers are also changing due to the pressures of work and family life that compete with unpaid work activities (Whittaker, McLennan & Handmer 2015, Heathrose 2013, Smith & Cordery 2010). A shift in practice towards informal and less traditional or more casual approaches to volunteering in emergency and disaster situations is increasing spontaneous grass roots or community-driven action (McLennan, Whittaker & Handmer 2016, United Nations 2015).

In New Zealand, the social contribution of volunteer work equates to over 270 million hours per year (Volunteering New Zealand 2016). Such voluntary participation is a vital component of emergency services within New Zealand, particularly in rural settings. According to Heathrose (2013):

> *In New Zealand there are 193 registered Volunteer Rural Fire Forces (VRFF) with approximately 3,500 volunteers. These forces respond to varying numbers of callouts, support their near-by urban forces, assist with road-related incidents and be the front-line response to protect property and life for over 96% of New Zealand's land area.*

(Heathrose, 2013)

This paper discusses some of the challenges associated with volunteering in New Zealand's multi-hazards environment. Previous research commissioned by the former Fire and Emergency Services (now Fire and Emergency New Zealand) focused on recruitment and retention of rural firefighting volunteers (Heathrose 2013, Kan 2003, UMR Research 2001). This research moves that focus to include approaches that support informal volunteering and contribute to the resilience of rural communities in New Zealand.

Method

A review was undertaken of 88 online documents and 53 peer-reviewed journal articles reporting volunteering research and practice within organisations and across natural hazard settings in New Zealand and internationally. While the review was to support research into the role of non-traditional rural fire volunteers in building community resilience, aspects of integrating formal and informal volunteers were uncovered. Vignettes (brief illustrative descriptions) are provided as lessons to guide the integration of formal and informal volunteers.

This research:

- builds a picture of the changing context of volunteering in New Zealand
- considers what Fire and Emergency New Zealand and other response agencies can learn from local and international natural hazard experiences
- identifies how formal and informal volunteering can be integrated as part of building community resilience to local hazards.

Defining 'volunteers' has limitations

Volunteering has a long tradition of practice in New Zealand and has evolved as a result of changing socio-political circumstances, social needs and hazard events (Smith & Cordery 2010). The New Zealand 2012 Census (Statistics New Zealand 2012) considers 'volunteering' to be activities undertaken for groups or organisations (i.e. formal volunteering). However, Volunteering New Zealand (2016), the peak body organisation for volunteers, defines volunteering[1] as 'any activity in which time is given freely to benefit another person, group or organisation' (Wilson & Musick 2000, p.215). This encompasses a broad range of activities not formalised by membership in volunteer organisations such as Fire and Emergency New Zealand. A such, volunteering includes unpaid work outside one's household, such as care giving and helping friends and neighbours with tasks. It may be spontaneous or planned; on one occasion or on a regular basis.

New Zealand is a bi-cultural nation with Treaty of Waitangi partnership between Māori (the Indigenous people) and the Crown. The official Indigenous language, Te Reo Māori, has no direct equivalent term for 'volunteering'. Instead, Māori have a concept of sharing, termed *mahi aroha*, which is based on kinship (*whanaungatanga*) and the individual and the collective benefits of contributing to the common good (Office for the Community and Voluntary Sector 2007).

In this paper, formal volunteers are those who require membership of an organisation to receive training and liability protections through compliance rules. Informal volunteering comprises a range of other activities that do not meet such criteria and includes casual volunteering at fundraising events, spontaneous volunteering during a crisis and emergency events (also referred to as episodic volunteering) and emergent volunteering made possible through new technologies such as social media or through new kinds of need. In this paper, traditional and non-traditional volunteers reflect the changes in volunteer practices and activities.

Effects of government policy

Retention of volunteers interests volunteer organisations and governments due to the increasing economic and social benefit that the volunteer sector provides (Volunteering New Zealand 2016). Training is recognised as an important contributing factor for retaining volunteers, as well as increasing the quality of service provided by volunteers, which often depends on resourcing and management capacities (Kilpatrick, Stirling & Orpin 2010). However, some underlying factors of why fire volunteers feel poorly supported and undervalued by their organisations stem from the level of communication skills of paid staff (Johnstone 2002) and the limited recognition of volunteer contribution by employers and members of the community (Kan 2003). Such concerns have influenced governments in Australia and New Zealand. Recent strategies aim to promote awareness of volunteering and provide incentives for employers to support volunteers (Australia-New Zealand Emergency Management Council 2015).

In their examination of literature to establish how to best enhance volunteering, Haski-Leventhal, and colleagues (2010) found on four reasons for governments to promote volunteering:

- Volunteers enjoy positive life benefits from volunteering.
- Volunteering enhances social capital and social cohesion.
- Volunteering can allow for more affordable and better-quality service provision.
- Volunteering improves democratic processes by increasing citizen participation (Haski-Leventhal, Meijs & Hustinx 2010).

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1   For a more comprehensive review of definitions of formal and informal volunteering, see Whittaker, McLennan & Handmer 2015.

Governments can influence volunteering in a variety of ways. These include legislative initiatives to make volunteering more accessible, publicly recognising volunteers and protecting volunteers (Haski-Leventhal, Meijs & Hustinx 2010). Governments can also support volunteers by making volunteering activities more acceptable and volunteer service attractive to employers as well as increasing community awareness of the contribution made by volunteers (Haski-Leventhal, Meijs & Hustinx 2010). Australian studies into volunteering and family life have recommended government initiatives ease the financial burden on volunteers, their families and employers that are directly associated with emergency services volunteering (McLennan & Birch 2009). Vignette 1 is an example of other ways governments can support volunteer recruitment and retention (McLennan, Whittaker & Handmer 2016).

Vignette 1: Volunteer Consultative Forum

Emergency Management Victoria was set up in 2014. From 2015, Emergency Management Victoria has held a Volunteer Consultative Forum to identify strategic priorities for emergency management volunteers. The process places importance on strategies to fit jobs to volunteers and to prepare for new groups of people who want to volunteer. An understanding of how to gain benefit from emerging types and groups of volunteers and provide support through changes in volunteer trends ensures a sustainable foundation for service delivery to communities in times of need (McLennan, Whittaker & Handmer 2016, p.5). The forums gives volunteers a voice on volunteer-related issues reflecting the government's commitment to listening to volunteer concerns. While the initiative is designed to promote health and wellbeing as well as improve recruitment, retention, capacity and training (Emergency Management Victoria n.d.), the forum recognised the need for 'flexible volunteering models, casual volunteer roles and funding towards a new community-based service delivery model' (McLennan, Whittaker & Handmer 2016, p.5).

Integrating informal and formal volunteers

The Australia-New Zealand Emergency Management Committee endorsed the *National Spontaneous Volunteer Strategy* in 2015 (Australia-New Zealand Emergency Management Council 2015). The strategy legitimises emergent informal volunteers and emphasises that emergency management organisations should plan for

spontaneous volunteers. In 2011, New Zealander, Sam Johnson, led a student 'army' of impromptu volunteers as part of clean-up efforts following the Christchurch earthquakes. This has become an exemplar for effective spontaneous volunteer action (Haywood 2012, p.70). The initiative shows the capacity of New Zealand's university student community to help others without the support of a formalised organisation. Thus, concerns remain that formalising the activities of informal volunteers may 'prove counterproductive' by limiting volunteers to innovate, adapt and be responsive to emergent needs (Whittaker, McLennan & Handmer 2015). Alternatively, a Civil Defence and Emergency Management initiative in Southland New Zealand has sought a more active involvement of the corporate sector. Riley (2016) reported on the enthusiasm of local businesses to train staff for spontaneous volunteer leadership to support the agency during disaster response. Preparing for disasters through such partnerships reflects the changing expectation of employees in seeking socially validated roles within their communities (Riley 2016).

Student Volunteer Army volunteers cleaning up silt in Christchurch, 2011.
Image: Student Volunteer Army digital archives, accessed 20 August 2018

While some initiatives demonstrate enthusiasm for spontaneous volunteer inclusion and a willingness to support informal volunteers through public and private investments, there are still hurdles to overcome for emergency services organisations working with informal volunteers. Some of the hurdles have been dealt with through social innovation, defined by Mulgan (2006) as where new ideas and social practice are designed to meet existing and emergent social needs by taking the form of innovative replicable programs or organisations.

Liability concerns and training coordinators

Volunteers acting independently of emergency management volunteer organisations tend to be viewed as a nuisance or liability and their efforts often

undervalued (Helsloot & Ruitenberg 2004, Sauer *et al.* 2014, Whittaker, McLennan & Handmer 2015). While spontaneous volunteers are valued during a crisis (Civil Defence and Emergency Management 2013), there is a sense that informal volunteers can be difficult to manage in circumstances when a carefully orchestrated and risk managed response is required. Examples include the Christchurch earthquake in 2011 and the Port Hills fires in 2017, where it proved difficult to manage people when they arrived at places where rescues or property protection were being undertaken. Employer Supported Volunteers was initiated in the Southland region of New Zealand and emerged from concerns that large numbers of people offering to help during a major emergency are difficult for emergency management services to deal with; interfering with them performing response activities (Riley 2016). However, spontaneous volunteers can be managed and used to ease pressures on formal volunteers and emergency services organisations, as shown in Vignette 2.

The Port Hills fires in 2017 brought together response organisations and community members alike to help clean up in the aftermath of difficult fires.
Image: Veronica Clifford

Vignette 2: Employer Supported Volunteers

Employer Supported Volunteers is a program initiated through Southland Civil Defence and Emergency Management (Riley 2016). The program commenced in 2016 following the experiences of the Christchurch 2010 and 2011 earthquakes. Southland Civil Defence and Emergency Management has partnered with local businesses to build capacity for managing spontaneous volunteers. Businesses are approached to offer leaders from their organisations with training as spontaneous volunteer managers. The program targets people in areas that may be isolated during a response and builds their capacity as coordinators of spontaneous volunteers. They also act as communication conduits into their workplace or communities. Such participation provides an avenue for raising awareness and creating leadership within communities. This training helps establish professional standards for spontaneous emergency response practice.

The Wellington Region Emergency Management Office has also experimented with ways to build community resilience capacity by exploring how emergency management is practiced in the urban area communities (Neely 2014). Training was a feature. A revamped Civil Defence and Emergency Management volunteer program looked at practical needs and worked with community leaders to develop the necessary skills without overburdening existing training regimes.

Collective intelligence

Spontaneous volunteering is unpredictable and improvisational in character but is not often considered as chaotic. Instead, the practical thinking of volunteers display focused and competent behaviours (Waldman & Kaminska 2015). Some authors recognise that emergent volunteers tend to be well-organised (Waldman & Kaminska 2015) and demonstrate a collective form of local intelligence (Büscher, Liegl & Thomas 2014). Local knowledge is often more situationally aware than decisions made under traditional, centralised volunteer command-and-control structures (Levy 1999). Rather than chaotic, emergent volunteers may be well able to assess situations and address local priorities (Dynes 2006). The decentralised nature of decision-making contributes to agility in thinking (Büscher *et al.* 2014), the capacity to adapt to circumstances (Waldman & Kaminska 2015) and rapid access to skills, resources and information (Levy 1999). Nevertheless, coordination of local intelligence with formal authorities remains extremely important.

During floods in Brisbane, Australia, in 2010–2011, coordinating collective intelligence developed out of a need to match informal volunteers to support the significant tasks of cleaning mud and debris from city streets. Some volunteers have skills beyond shovelling mud that are also required during a response. Coordination of these skills with tasks that needed to be undertaken, such as administrative, logistic and physical work delivers an efficient and effective response. Vignette 3 describes an innovation that came about to match volunteer skills to needs during Brisbane's flood disaster response (McLennan *et al.* 2016).

Vignette 3: Emergency Volunteering and Community Response to Extreme Weather

In Queensland the Emergency Volunteering Community Response to Extreme Weather (EV-CREW) service was a response to large-scale disaster events like the floods in Brisbane in 2010-2011. At the time of the floods, Volunteering Queensland was confronted by over 120,000 offers to help that resulted in around 23,000 'casual' volunteer placements with response organisations including the Brisbane City Council (McLennan et al. 2016). The model for EV-CREW was modified from the business of a temporary recruitment agency that included registering and matching volunteers to areas of need across various government, non-government and community organisations. In this way, the massive numbers of casual volunteers could be vetted through EV-CREW to help communities without adding pressure to already time-constrained emergency responders.

Self-organising volunteers

Self-organising volunteers are social innovations that can be localised in character and may not necessarily signal the need for structured legal requirements to help others during emergency events. One of the complaints about volunteer firefighters is the onerous paperwork to manage a brigade (UMR Research 2001). In contrast, the New Zealand Rena oil spill clean-up in 2011 was an efficient and effective response, partly due to the connectivity and values of the Māori community and social networks (Smith *et al.* 2016).

In Australia, some community self-help groups have formalised their volunteer practices. For example, BlazeAid in Victoria was the result of neighbours offering to rebuild burnt fences following the Black Saturday fires in 2009 (BlazeAid n.d.). This shows how self-organising volunteers addressed concerns of liability and credibility of their volunteering services (Vignette 4).

Vignette 4: BlazeAid

Many people volunteer their time when disasters occur. This may be via personal connections like BlazeAid in Australia and the MV *Rena* oil spill in New Zealand or as part of a formal group such as the Australian Red Cross. The reputation of a volunteer organisation plays a role in gaining the confidence of community members to participate or to work with volunteers. However, the ease with which volunteering is framed, including the kind of language used, such as 'help when you can' may also appeal to people with initiative but less time to commit to permanent volunteering. Motivated to help farmers rebuild fences and clear debris from properties, the 'help when you can' philosophy of BlazeAid to give as 'little or as long as you like' has helped established it as a popular initiative, including with international visitors. This has lasted since the Black Saturday bushfires in Victoria, Australia, in 2009. By offering volunteers worker insurance and a code-of-conduct, BlazeAid provides a level of protection usually offered by more formal organisations to volunteers as well as the people who use them (Whittaker, McLennan & Handmer 2015).

Volunteers help clean-up Papamoa Beach in the Bay of Plenty after an oil spill from MV *Rena* in 2011.
Image: Reproduced with permission by Sunlive, New Zealand

Formalising informal involvement

Other resources have been developed to help manage informal volunteers, such as guidelines in New Zealand (Civil Defence and Emergency Management 2013). As early as 1995, the Canadian Ministry of Social Services together with the Red Cross produced a booklet covering necessary issues—*The 30-minute Quick-response Guide for Training the Episodic Volunteer* (Canadian Red Cross Society 1995).

A first step towards incorporating informal volunteers into emergency response is to eliminate negative assumptions about 'ordinary' citizens and groups and to regard them as assets. In Amsterdam, a five-step model was developed that integrates informal first responders and formal response staff at an emergency. This helps critical discussions to take place between responders and volunteers (Scanlon, Helsloot & Groenondaal 2014). Such steps can alleviate concerns about spontaneous volunteers. The use of third parties or corporate approaches that build on government initiatives as well as the corporate social responsibility movement, suggests that some issues of integration may be overcome by private for-profit sectors. In the U.S., the American Red Cross (2015) uses spontaneous or casual volunteers to also build culture of preparedness (Vignette 5).

Vignette 5: American Red Cross and WW Grainger Inc.

An example of corporate volunteerism facilitated through partnerships with a disaster relief organisation is the 'Ready When the Time Comes' programme initiated by the American Red Cross and WW. Grainger Inc. (an emergency equipment supply company). Employees from enlisted businesses are trained and mobilised by the Red Cross as a community-based volunteer emergency response service during disasters. In 2011 the programme had 14,000 trained volunteers from more than 460 businesses and organisations in 54 cities (American Red Cross, 2014). American Red Cross promote the programme as a way for companies to become involved in their communities, develop their employees' skills, and align with a highly respected USA philanthropic organisation. The main focus of the training offered is to help communities prepare, respond and recover from disasters with the focus on mental health, health and sheltering.

Lessons to consider

There are several ways organisations can work with informal volunteers. New Zealand and international examples illustrate the strengths of combining resources, skills and knowledge of informal and formal volunteers. Each brings implicit motivations and the integration of informal and formal volunteers provides some valuable lessons.

Addressing liability concerns through training: Employer Supported Volunteers managed the influx of informal volunteers who were often seen as a liability by building capacity through training employees of companies as spontaneous volunteer managers. This contributed to local leadership. However, opening up leadership can, in some cases, lead to contested approaches as to what constitutes appropriate action. Planning for emergencies together helps coordination and improves leadership and response efforts.

Matching tasks and skills: Emergency Volunteering – Community Response to Extreme Weather is a similar innovation and matches tasks and skills of volunteers to the range of activities that need to be done. Recognising that volunteers bring competence as well as focused behaviour can integrate volunteers better but can leave the issue of legal liability and volunteer protection unattended.

Self-organising volunteers: BlazeAid, the Student Volunteer Army and other localised approaches (including digitally connected networks) indicate how local intelligence can be used, reputation can be built and adequate levels of competence can be achieved to sustain the momentum of support. Concerns about the increased regulatory environment of volunteering are occasionally met by self-organising volunteers, at the same time as engaging more flexibly with the needs of volunteers and commitments they can offer through more casual volunteering opportunities.

Formalising informal involvement: The 'Ready When the Time Comes' program (American Red Cross 2015) was a partnership between the American Red Cross and the equipment supply company, WW Grainger Inc. This, and other examples of third-party engagements are corporate approaches to building relationships between informal volunteers and emergency services organisations. Building on government initiatives and increasing volunteer capacity by training members of communities and incorporating developments in corporate social responsibility can return some company profits to support communities.

Fire and Emergency New Zealand can benefit by working with other emergency services organisations and with informal and formal volunteers to increase capacity before and after disaster events. Examples of existing practices that can be developed include:

- working in a multi-agency context, learning from other organisations, not only in times of response but also other areas of readiness and recovery

- supporting spontaneous volunteers by providing training, promoting the organisation and building recruitment potential
- recognising emergent volunteer skills (and digital capabilities) for increasing community outreach and partnership
- supporting volunteer families and building on the traditional strengths of volunteering in New Zealand
- introducing new types of volunteer including working with migrants and strengthening relationships with *iwi, hapū* and *whānau*[2] of Māori communities.

Conclusion

This research provides a backdrop to the challenges and opportunities for volunteer organisations in New Zealand. It is internationally recognised that volunteers work in dynamic environments and include traditional and emergent volunteers. While this has been appreciated in some areas, there is opportunity for Fire and Emergency New Zealand and other emergency services organisations to develop response capacity. This can be assisted by understanding the motivations of volunteers for their recruitment and retention, as either formal or informal volunteers providing different types of services beyond traditional roles to include readiness, reduction and recovery.

Volunteers working together, but across different organisations, as well as non-traditional volunteers working more flexibly and with changing expectations, present challenges for managing them. The personal motivation and autonomy of informal volunteers may be different to those wanting formal volunteer opportunities.

This research offers some insights that can help volunteer organisations and managers appreciate the dynamic context of volunteering. Particular attention needs to be given to the opportunities for attracting diverse volunteers, before and after emergency events. In turn, this would contribute to community resilience and recognises the use of social innovations of formal and informal volunteer organisation.

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2 *Iwi* are the ancestral tribes, *hapū* are the subtribes of descendants and *whānau*, the extended families of Māori.

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