

# **‘BOOMNET’**

## **Capturing the Baby Boomer Volunteers**

**A Research Project into Baby Boomers and Volunteering**

**Conducted by TEAM CONSULTANTS**

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## **Capturing the Baby Boomer Volunteers**

### **A Research Project into Baby Boomers and Volunteering**

*The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but having new eyes.*

*Marcel Proust*

#### **Background to the Research Project**

In August 2001, the Department of Premier and Cabinet in partnership with the Office of Seniors Interests in Western Australia, commissioned TEAM CONSULTANTS – a research, education and coaching company – under the direction of principal researcher, Judy Esmond, Ph.D. to conduct a research project into ‘Baby Boomers and Volunteering’.

Being aware that in 2001 the oldest of the Baby Boomers (born between 1946 and 1963) have reached the early retirement age of 55 years, there was a recognised need to identify motivating factors and barriers that may impinge upon the decision by Baby Boomers to volunteer their services in the community. This information would be used to develop strategies to assist in the recruitment and support of Baby Boomers as volunteers. Such strategies, where successful, would have the potential to impact directly on the well-being of Baby Boomers themselves, the non-profit organisations that utilise volunteers and the community as a whole.

#### **Research Objectives**

The brief for this research identified two key research objectives and four specific objectives.

##### *Key Research Objectives*

- To identify the ‘motivators and barriers’ for Baby Boomers to include volunteering in their plans for later years.

- To develop strategies to recruit and support Baby Boomers as volunteers, in urban and rural/remote areas, both now and in later years when they retire or change their work practices.

### *Specific Objectives*

- To research information regarding current levels of volunteering among Baby Boomers in Western Australia.
- To identify relevant research and information to assist and understand the motivators and barriers for Baby Boomers to include volunteering in their plans.
- To consult with organisations and individuals in the community to obtain their views and ideas about motivators and barriers to volunteering, and to obtain their views on responding to these motivators and barriers. Such consultation may be obtained through focus groups.
- To provide a report addressing the results of the above research and recommending strategies to recruit and support Baby Boomer volunteers.

### **Methodology**

The research methodology undertaken in this project combined a variety of research methods and consisted of *five* components:

- Review of Relevant Literature.
- Interviews with Representatives from Organisations that Utilise Volunteers.
- Creativity Sessions with Baby Boomers.
- Interviews with Representatives from the Indigenous Community.
- Focus Group Discussions with Baby Boomers.

## Review of the Relevant Literature.

A literature review was undertaken as the first component of the research prior to the commencement of any of the other research methods. The purpose of the literature review was to examine research and literature specifically relating to Baby Boomers and Volunteering. In recent years there has been an increasing amount of literature written about the Baby Boomers *per se* (Dychtwald & Flower, 1990; 199Foot & Stoffman, 1997; Mackay, 1997; McCallum & Geiselhart, 1996; Mills, 1987; Salt, 2001). However, research *specifically* examining Baby Boomers and Volunteering is practically non-existent in Australia and throughout the world, even though this population cohort represents our greatest potential pool of volunteers both now and in the future.

Only one recent Australian study, which dealt with some issues regarding Baby Boomers and Volunteering, could be located. This study was completed in New South Wales in 2001 and is entitled 'Older People and Volunteering'. This study also noted the lack of literature available, stating: "there was a dearth of evidence-based research pertaining to the next generation of older people, particularly in Australia. Further, no literature pertaining specifically to Baby Boomers and their current or future attitudes to volunteering could be sourced" (Heartbeat Trends, 2001:8).

Therefore, an extensive review of research literature on Baby Boomers and Volunteering could not be undertaken. However, the limited literature available which does mention volunteering in the context of discussing a wider range of issues concerning the Baby Boomer generation has been incorporated into this report.

## Interviews with Representatives from Organisations that Utilise Volunteers.

The second component of the research undertaken was a series of one-to-one interviews with paid representatives from organisations that recruit and utilise volunteers. The selection of participants was based on providing a representation from a diverse range of organisations within the community. These included organisations involved with social

services and welfare; children, youth and education; health and disability; sport, fitness, leisure and hobby; emergency services and justice; politics, information and advocacy; and environment and animal welfare.

Further, participants from both *urban and rural/remote* settings and those working with *ethnic* communities were also selected. This provided for a diversity of views from across the different community sectors, different ethnic communities and across urban and rural locations.

A total of 60 short interviews were conducted and depending on time, location and the availability of the participants, the interviews were undertaken either in person or by telephone. These interviews provided an enormous amount of information which assisted in the development and direction taken in the third component of the research methodology – the creativity sessions.

#### Creativity Sessions with Baby Boomers.

The creativity sessions were undertaken with two separate groups consisting of a total of 20 participants per group from the Baby Boomer cohort aged 40 to 55 years. Each creativity session was facilitated as a group workshop process concentrating on a limited number of key questions or themes for the participants. Participants worked in small groups and ‘brainstormed’ their responses to the key questions/themes. These responses were then discussed in a free-flowing process and explained to the researcher in greater depth and detail by the participants within the group.

The first creativity session concentrated on key questions and themes concerning the ‘motivators’ and ‘barriers’ for Baby Boomers to become involved in volunteering.

The second creativity session concentrated on key questions and themes concerning the ‘needs’ of Baby Boomers as volunteers and the specific question of: “What would it take (what would an organisation have to do) for you (as a Baby Boomer) to volunteer for this

organisation?” These key questions and themes were designed to assist in the development of strategies to attract and support Baby Boomers as volunteers.

#### Interviews with Representatives from Indigenous Communities.

The fourth component involved interviews with three key community representatives from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background.

Again, one-to-one interviews were conducted and depending on time, location and the availability of the participants, these interviews were undertaken either in person or by telephone. These interviews provided an indigenous perspective on volunteering as a whole that had not been considered by any previous methodologies.

#### Focus Group Discussions with Baby Boomers.

The final component in the research methodology was the conducting of a series of focus group discussions with four different groups of Baby Boomers. The focus groups consisted of four to eight participants per group, with a similar number of males and females when averaged across the groups. The first two focus groups were located in urban areas, with the first being comprised of Baby Boomers between 40 to 44 years of age and the second being comprised of Baby Boomers between 45 to 49 years of age. The third and fourth focus groups were located in rural areas (population approximately 2,500 and 750 residents respectively) and comprised of Baby Boomers aged 50 to 55 years. The majority of participants had been or were currently volunteers within the ABS (2001:44) definition of a ‘volunteer’ as: “someone who willingly gives unpaid help in the form of time, service or skills, through an organisation or group”.

These focus group discussions were conducted with a view to clarifying and/or expanding upon the main themes that had emerged from previous methodologies. These focus groups also provided a further comparison, beyond the individual interviews, between urban and rural/remote settings and different age categories from the Baby Boomer cohort.

The range, variety and complexity of the methodologies provided a rich matrix of research findings for this report and the completion of each preceding stage assisted in the development and focus of the next stage in the research methodology.

## **Research Findings and Discussion**

Because of the range of methodologies used in conducting this research and the vast amount of information collected, the reporting of research findings that encompass the results of each component would be extensive and unproductive. It was therefore determined that for this report, the key themes that consistently emerged in the different methodologies would provide the focus for discussion and would be the most effective form of written presentation of the findings.

In the early stages of this research, particularly in relation to the initial interviews with paid staff from organisations that utilise volunteers and in the first creativity session with Baby Boomers, the central theme was the identification of a range of ‘motivators and barriers’ for Baby Boomers to volunteer. This provided a lengthy and ever increasing list of motivators and barriers. In fact when the motivations for Baby Boomers to volunteer and the barriers to their volunteering were considered, they seemed almost infinite and were as varied as the uniqueness of each individual.

Accordingly, the research then required a re-focusing and emphasis was placed in the second creativity session and subsequent methodological stages on identifying the ‘needs’ of Baby Boomers in volunteering. This focus on needs, rather than simply motivators and barriers, elicited the essential components of what would be required to attract, recruit and retain Baby Boomer volunteers, and implicitly refined the list of motivators and barriers to volunteering.

As the findings were analysed, *seven* strategic focus areas consistently emerged as being both central and critical to the development of future strategies to capture Baby Boomers



as volunteers. These strategic focus areas can usefully be presented in this report under the acronym BOOMNET:

B - Boomers

O - Organised

O - Openness

M - Meaningful

N - Needs

E - Education

T - Time

**B** is for **B**aby Boomers and **T**heir Characteristics.

The Australian Baby Boomers, born between 1946 and 1963, were the outcome, as Mackay (1997: 59) explains: "...of two other booms which began in the late 1940s and lasted until the early 1960s: the marriage boom and the economic boom. The dramatic rise in the post war birth rate was a direct consequence of the rise in the rate of marriage...This was, in some ways, a response to post war optimism. People were expressing their confidence in the future by marrying in unprecedentedly large numbers and, in turn, producing the babies that would create the baby boom".

The first of these Baby Boomers are just turning 55 years of age and between 2011 and 2021 the peak numbers of Baby Boomers will swell the ranks of those of the conventional retirement age of 65 years (ABS, 1998a).

The sheer size of the Baby Boom generation as it has moved through different life stages has long dominated the attention of politicians, demographers, marketers, business people, social scientists and the general public. It is therefore rather surprising that there is a glaring absence of evidence-based research worldwide pertaining specifically to Baby Boomers and Volunteering.

As Dychtwald and Flower (1990:19) explain in their best-selling book, *Age Wave*: “at each stage of their lives, the needs and desires of the Baby Boomers have become the dominant concerns...if you can anticipate the movement of the Baby Boom generation’s life-span migration, you can see the future”.

Foot and Stoffman (1997) in their book *Boom, Bust & Echo* predict that the non-profit sector will soon see a surge in volunteering as this activity tends to increase with age. They suggest that it is one of the rare activities that increases as we get older and the huge Baby Boomer generation are beginning to enter a life stage when their children are leaving home and beginning to consider other ways of giving back to their community.

Freedman (2000) in his book *Prime Time* explains that surveys increasingly indicate that volunteering will be included in what he terms the ‘third’ part of Baby Boomers’ lives.

In *Australia’s New Aged: Issues for Young and Old*, McCallum and Geiselhart (1996:45) confirm these predictions of increased numbers of volunteers: “we are going to see a surge in the numbers of people middle-aged and older, healthy and willing...a powerful engine for change and reform they could be if fully empowered...their potential far exceeds conventional ideas of volunteer work”.

The findings of this research support these predictions. The majority of participants in all four focus groups suggested they would consider some form of volunteering activities in retirement.

*Yes I can see myself doing voluntary work, when I am not as busy in paid employment (female participant).*

Besides the obvious suggestion that Baby Boomers may have more time to become involved in volunteering when their children leave home, there are other factors that support the prediction of an increased interest in volunteering by Baby Boomers.

Put simply, many Baby Boomers are now experiencing a time of ‘mid-life crisis’. This is a time when people begin to ask themselves what they are going to do with the rest of their lives. There is a need to reflect on the past, to question the present and to re-focus, re-assess and re-prioritise for the future. For many Baby Boomers, particularly males, it is the movement of a mind set from *success* to *significance*. They have often been very successful in their careers and they now also want their lives to be significant.

For others, it is a slightly different mind set, as Foot and Stoffman explain (1997:127): “If you are a junior vice-president in a large corporation, you realise you are never going to be president because too many other people are in the way. You’re also fed up with working for someone else. This is when you seek career counselling, start your own company, and go back to church. This is also when, after years in the corporate world, you rediscover the idealistic side of your personality”.

Volunteering offers the ideal opportunity and outlet for feeling significant and fills a need for social and community involvement.

This process of reflecting on their lives was particularly true for the Baby Boomers in our focus groups whose children were older and more independent. Predominantly, these were the participants in the 50 to 55 year age group.

*When the kids start leaving home, you begin to look again at what you’re going to do in the future* (male participant).

Indeed, as Carpenter (2001:1) explains: “examples abound of boomers...committing to volunteering as they hit middle age, even if a majority remain preoccupied with careers, families and leisure interests”. Certainly, almost all the participants in our individual interviews, creativity sessions and focus groups saw volunteering as a very positive way of giving something back to their community.

*We all know what volunteering can do for people in the community, that's one of the reasons I still work here, with this agency...seeing what a difference it can make in people's lives (female participant).*

As the Baby Boomers march steadily on towards the conventional retirement age, their numbers can be expected to swell the volunteering market. The latest ABS survey, *Voluntary Work, Australia* (2001:1 & 6) confirms: "growth in volunteer rates occurred for both sexes and across all age groups, but particularly the 18-24 (17% to 27%) and 55-64 (24% to 33%) years groups". And "although the number of volunteers was highest in the age group 35-44 years, median hours of voluntary work tended to increase steadily with age, up to 65-74 years age group...this correlates with the decrease in family and paid work commitments with advancing age".

The Baby Boomers are far from a homogeneous cohort, as its members span a large number of life years. There are early-boomers, late-boomers, second wave boomers and trailing edge boomers to mention a few. However, this research suggests that for those Baby Boomers aged 40 to 55 years there is a sufficient similarity in attitudes and characteristics to allow for the provision of a framework designed to encourage these Baby Boomers to volunteer.

The good news for Western Australian non-profit organisations that utilise volunteers is that the Baby Boomers are out there, in large numbers, and they can see themselves involved in volunteering in the future. As at 30 June 2000, in a total Western Australian population of 1 857 586, Baby Boomers totalled 436 245 (ABS, 2000). Of the 35 to 54 years age group 200,600 people volunteered 35.7 million hours, having the highest volunteer rate (37%), as compared to those aged 18 to 34 years (30%) and 55 years and over (27%) (ABS, 2001).

Understanding the characteristics and aspirations of Baby Boomers is the first of seven strategic focus areas on which organisations will need to concentrate to be successful in recruiting Baby Boomer volunteers.

## O is for Organised, Professional and Well Managed Organisations.

Although in some ways the need for organisations, whether large or small, to be organised, professional and well managed may seem obvious, for many of the participants in both the creativity sessions and focus groups, their experiences in voluntary work had been otherwise. In other words, a lack of these qualities within organisational structures was identified as one of the barriers to involvement or continued involvement in volunteering.

*When you haven't got a clear role and nobody really knows what's going on, you just don't want to be part of all that (male participant).*

*When I would contact them with a query about what to do, it was always someone different I had to speak to and then I had to explain it all again, there was just no communication in that office (female participant).*

Many of the participants in the individual interviews who actually worked for these organisations reinforced the views of some focus group and creativity session participants that there were aspects within their own organisations that could be vastly improved.

*We don't look after our volunteers as well as we could - I know that. But sometimes it is very difficult, if management isn't motivated and supportive you're like the 'meat in the sandwich' trying to do right thing by your volunteers and trying to deal with the manager. Some managers wouldn't know what a volunteer does or looks like and yet the volunteers are the 'core' of what we do (female participant).*

This is not to suggest that all organisations were unprofessional and disorganised, as there were many examples described by participants of well managed organisations.

*I can't fault them – everyone there is excellent, I really enjoy being a volunteer there and I know a lot of others who do too (female participant).*

Noble (2000:159), however, does comment on a recent United Kingdom study which found that: “seven out of 10 volunteers reported dissatisfaction with the way their volunteer work was organised”.

An emphasis on the need for professionalism and good management in non-profit organisations is not such a recent phenomena, but what is different is the response of Baby Boomer volunteers to any shortcomings by organisations in these areas.

Perhaps because many Baby Boomers have needed to be well organised in their busy personal lives to ‘juggle’ family, work and other activities, or perhaps because many come from professional backgrounds or managerial roles themselves, their standards and expectations are high. They view their time as enormously important and they do not have the time or patience for a disorganised volunteering experience. It may also be because they are more assertive than any generation before them. Unlike their parents who may have continued to volunteer for an organisation despite its management shortcomings, Baby Boomers will leave because of these shortcomings.

The Baby Boomer generation is set to re-shape and re-define many organisations in the non-profit sector that utilise volunteers. They will demand a higher standard of management and performance by organisations than any volunteer cohort before them. A very clear finding emerged that Baby Boomers’ time is precious - they will not volunteer for organisations that cannot provide a professional service not only to their clients, but also to their volunteers. Volunteers do have choices and if their experience is not a positive one, Baby Boomers will simply vote with their feet and leave.

David Foot cited in Ferronato (1999:4) supports this concept by posing the question: “are you ready for the vigilante volunteer?” Foot predicts that although the coming pool of volunteers will be large, they must be treated with flexibility and professionalism. He describes vigilante volunteers as: “middle-aged professionals who are finished parenting, have money, and are seeking fulfilment through community contribution. However, these people are still busy with work, and are very specific about their needs and objectives, and about the time and scheduling of their volunteer commitment. You’ve

got to find a way to accommodate them, and don't waste their time or they'll move on to the next place".

However, this increased need for organisational professionalism also requires a balance with the needs of the volunteers. Noble (2000: 159), Australia's most noted writer on volunteering issues, sums it up when she states: "good management is not synonymous with regulation and control, rather it allows people the freedom to operate to their full potential". Although Baby Boomers want a professional and well-organised volunteering experience, they do not respond effectively to too much structure, too much control, over-regulation or bureaucratic 'red tape'. The over-management of a volunteer program can be just as detrimental as the under-management of a program.

Achieving this 'fine' organisational balance is the second strategic area on which to focus for those organisations wishing to capture the potential Baby Boomer volunteers.

### O is for Openness and a Supportive Organisational Environment Where Volunteers are Truly Valued.

The third strategic focus area identified in this research covered a range of issues regarding *openness* that were discussed in greater depth and detail by participants in the creativity sessions and some of the focus groups. These included issues relating to openness and feedback; cliques; support; insurance; occupational health and safety; and the valuing of volunteers.

When participants in the creativity sessions discussed openness within an organisation, they were predominantly referring to the ability of paid staff and management within an organisation to accept, respond to and act on feedback from volunteers. This required an organisational environment which encouraged feedback from volunteers, even though at times this feedback could be quite negative in its nature.

In the interviews with individual representatives from organisations, although many participants spoke of encouraging volunteers to provide feedback, few identified any

formal processes that allowed for the giving of constructive feedback. It was often anecdotal, ad hoc and sporadic (e.g., a satisfaction survey for volunteers after a crisis situation).

However, for those organisations described by participants in the creativity sessions as examples of well managed and professional organisations, they identified two ‘key’ strategies implemented by the organisation. These strategies were: (i) an in-built, planned and on-going process of consultation with and evaluation by their volunteers; and (ii) a real valuing and appreciation of volunteers by everyone in the organisation – management, paid staff and the volunteers themselves.

*They are always asking us how we could get better as a group, what to do differently and not only do they ask but they actually do something most times when we tell them something. Other places never asked or sometimes they asked but they don't do a damn thing about it (male participant).*

As Baby Boomers are assertive and often well educated, they are used to giving, and want to give, feedback. They will certainly not be prepared to stand by without comment and will not remain in organisations that do not encourage an openness of feedback or do not actively respond to this feedback when it is given.

Another issue which emerged from participants in the creativity sessions was the identification of *cliques* as a significant impediment to openness in organisations. Several participants spoke of joining an organisation to volunteer and finding that they were unable to break into the ‘clique’ and be accepted. Although every organisation or group has its own culture and environment, participants spoke of the need for management to be aware of this and to actively develop strategies so that their organisation does not become a closed group and an obstacle or disincentive for new volunteers.

All participants in this research, whether paid staff, volunteers or non-volunteers, agreed that *support* was critical for volunteers. In discussing the issues of support for



volunteers, participants identified the need for organisations to have adequate insurance coverage for volunteers and a clear occupational health and safety policy.

Many paid organisational representatives spoke of their concerns about issues relating to litigation and the negative affect this will have on Baby Boomers' willingness to volunteer. However, the Baby Boomer volunteers felt that the best strategy for any organisation to adopt was to reassure their volunteers, through a strong overall message (both explicit and implied), that: "no matter what happens we will support you".

Many other types and aspects of support for volunteers were discussed by participants and often these support needs were unique for each individual. However, a common theme amongst those who were previously volunteers was that one of the main reasons for their cessation of volunteering for that organisation and in some cases, their reluctance to volunteer again in the future, was a feeling that they had not been supported.

*Supported, I'm not sure what that means, it certainly didn't happen for me. I would describe it as feeling totally unsupported, you were just left and hung out to dry (male participant).*

Interrelated to the issue of support is the recognition by all participants of the need for volunteers to be *valued and appreciated* for their volunteering contribution. Many of those interviewed from organisations described ways in which they do 'thank' their volunteers but a number also felt that they could do this better and more often.

It has sometimes been suggested that volunteers do not want to be thanked, that the volunteering in itself is thank you enough. This research does not support that view. It found that Baby Boomers do want to be thanked for their volunteer effort. The ways in which this is undertaken can differ for various individuals, from public ceremonies to personal thankyou notes, but all considered thanks to be an important element in retaining volunteers and of valuing and appreciating their contribution. Several people in the focus groups had decided to cease volunteering for an organisation primarily because

no-one had bothered to say thank you. Further, the lack of thanks had also made them less likely to consider volunteering again in the future.

*I would have still been there today you know, all I needed after all my hard work was for someone to just say thank you and I would have done it again, but no-one did (female participant).*

Finally participants, particularly in the creativity sessions, explained that part of feeling valued in an organisation was not only to be thanked and appreciated for their voluntary contribution but to be treated with equality. In most cases this meant an equality with paid staff.

Baby Boomers will take conflictual issues between paid staff and volunteers to a new level as they see themselves as equal to paid staff in any organisation. They will not ask for but demand equal treatment. Organisations that do not urgently implement strategies to get their 'house in order', where tensions and inequalities have not been worked through, and the contribution of both paid and volunteer staff is not equally appreciated, will find themselves without Baby Boomer volunteers - they will once again vote with their feet and leave.

### **M** is for Meaningful, Interesting, Creative and Challenging Volunteering Opportunities.

Baby Boomers will not only challenge the structure of organisations that recruit volunteers but they will also challenge the very nature of the voluntary work itself. They are more informed and better educated than their parents and will no longer be prepared to undertake what they regard as boring work, such as 'stuffing envelopes'.

Baby Boomers are demanding more meaningful, interesting, creative and challenging volunteer work. And if organisations don't take these points seriously and re-assess their volunteer tasks, Baby Boomers will take their volunteering elsewhere. It is not that the Baby Boomers are more or less giving than their parents, it is just that if they are going

to give of their time, and this is one of their most precious commodities, they want it to be a meaningful and interesting volunteering experience.

Those participants who spoke of volunteering in retirement or semi-retirement were particularly clear that the volunteer work needed to be interesting. Often it would be voluntary work that was very different from their present paid work, so that they were challenged and 'stretched' in new directions.

*I wouldn't be interested in just helping out, I'd need to do something that's going to keep me interested and challenge me, keep me wanting to come back. I get bored very easily you know (male participant).*

Also, the need for interesting volunteer work was particularly true for the female participants. This finding supports the view of Esmond (2001:210-211) in her book *Count Me In! 501 Ideas on Recruiting Volunteers* that: "with more women in the workforce than ever before, either through choice or economic necessity, fewer women are able to spare the time to volunteer...Those who *do* volunteer are demanding more challenging and rewarding assignments". Organisations will need to: "explore ways of creating even more stimulating and satisfying tasks".

Intertwined with the desire for more creative volunteering opportunities is the Baby Boomers response to the ageing process. For Baby Boomers, age is a very sensitive issue. They certainly feel that age is more a state of mind than a particular chronological age and many will avoid organisations that have an image that is not of energetic, fun and youthful activity as a volunteer. Many of our traditional non-profit organisations are suffering from this image problem, being perceived to be tired, worn out and uninteresting.

*I went along and thought I'd do some volunteer work and when I got there I found it was a group of silver-haired old dears sitting around sewing and chatting. That's not for me – I was the youngest there (female participant).*

It seems that Baby Boomers are much less accepting of being seen as getting older and are adamant in their views. They will not grow old gracefully, but will defy, deny and fight the ageing process every step of the way!

Any organisation that aims to recruit Baby Boomers now and in the future would be well advised to adopt the strategy of re-structuring their recruitment campaign around a more youthful message and to advertise a range of challenging and creative volunteering opportunities.

A further aspect of discussion amongst participants in both creativity sessions was the importance of reinforcing for volunteers how the voluntary tasks they are performing are not only meaningful in themselves but also how they are meaningful in contributing to the 'big' picture – the organisational vision or mission. Participants described examples of volunteers who had become disillusioned and disheartened as they were unable to see how the work they were doing, which seemed of little consequence, was an important contribution to the overall work of the organisation.

*A friend of mine just had to leave, it was very stressful work and she just felt like what she was doing was a drop in the ocean and going nowhere. After she left they called her and said that what each person was doing was all helping, but it was too late then (female participant).*

All volunteers need to be shown how their voluntary effort contributes to the organisation overall and is making a difference. This should not be on an ad hoc basis but as part of a considered strategy. “The single most powerful message organisations can transmit to potential volunteers is that they will make a difference” (Heartbeat Trends, 2001:20).

If the type of voluntary work Baby Boomers are engaged in is creative, challenging and interesting to them, this will reinforce the feeling that they are indeed making a difference.

## N is for the Needs of the Volunteer.

Make no mistake, non-profit organisations seeking to attract and recruit volunteers are in the ‘customer service business’. They are selling the volunteering experience. The question is then: “Is the volunteering experience that the organisation is selling, worth buying?” For volunteers to answer this question, whether consciously or subconsciously, the answer is intertwined with another question: “Will this volunteering experience meet my needs?”

For the parents of the Baby Boomers, volunteering was simply part of what you did. It was a responsibility you had as a member of the community. Baby Boomers are from a consumer generation and are more sophisticated in identifying and explaining their desires and needs. For them, volunteering is also about having their own needs met in the voluntary experience.

It might be time to adopt a new strategy by asking potential volunteers, beginning with the Baby Boomers: “What are your *needs* in volunteering?” If organisations are able to identify the needs of the potential volunteer, then they are more likely to be able to ‘match’ the individual to a volunteering opportunity that meets these needs. The Baby Boomers in this research were not averse to explaining their specific needs and they certainly expect their voluntary work to meet these needs.

*When I volunteer again in the future, this time it will be for me. Right now all my volunteering relates to the kids and their needs. In the future I will do volunteer work that is just for me, no-one else, for my needs. I’ll have a good look around and I know what I’m looking for* (female participant).

As Heartbeat Trends in their research on *Older People and Volunteering* (2001:17) explain: “So for organisations that rely on volunteers, the challenge is to position volunteering opportunities as positive choices, as something they want to do for themselves, not just for the community. For men in particular, the right volunteering opportunity can provide a renewed sense of purpose and structure in their ‘winding

down' years; a way to continue to feel useful, productive, and part of mainstream society. Women, on the other hand, may be looking for volunteer roles that provide them with the opportunity for new experiences, new challenges and stimulation”.

The clear recognition by Baby Boomers of their expectation that their volunteering experience will meet their needs, signals the vital importance for organisations to follow a strategy of becoming increasingly customer focussed in relation to their volunteers. Recruitment material can no longer simply emphasise the benefits to the organisation of volunteer effort, but must now include the benefits to the volunteer from the experience. Successful organisations will be able to achieve the balance of meeting the needs of both the organisation and their volunteers.

Just as businesses today customise their products and services to meet the individual needs of discerning consumers, so must non-profit organisations in response to Baby Boomer volunteers. Mills (1987), cited in Heartbeat Trends (2001:30), explains that in relation to their paid work: “where previous generations have largely fitted themselves to the demands of work, the Baby Boomers insist that the job be adjusted to fit them”. This will also increasingly be the case in their voluntary work.

This represents an enormous challenge for many non-profit organisations who may have been used to volunteers simply fitting in with anything and everything required of them by the organisation. Many organisations are already thinking strategically and responding to this challenge and developing different kinds of volunteering opportunities, ones designed and tailored specifically to meet the unique needs of individual Baby Boomer volunteers.

### **E is for Education.**

In recent times there has been determined push for an increased training of volunteers across all non-profit sectors. Two interrelated issues that may have fuelled this push are: the desire for a heightened professionalism by volunteers, the achievement of which has been equated to training; and the concerns of organisations about litigation.

On the surface, such requirements - professionalism and training - seem advantageous to both the volunteer and the organisation. It is essential, however, to find a balance between these requirements and the needs of the volunteers. There was a recognition by group participants of the importance for the organisation to provide training for volunteers. However, there was a concern amongst some participants in the creativity sessions and focus groups and from some paid staff in organisations that as the balance swings towards more and more training, the needs and the reasons why volunteers joined may get lost in the process.

*I'm not sure what is going on. Our volunteers were doing a fine job before and suddenly they need to have all this training – where is this coming from? How can I go back and tell people who have been volunteering for years, that they now need to be involved in training to show them how to do the job they're already doing? (male participant).*

Baby Boomer volunteers are giving of their time without financial reward and most Baby Boomers are not looking for training to achieve certificates. They are already in the midst of their own busy careers and often better educated than the accreditation being offered through the training process.

As with many other strategic focus areas discussed in this report, Baby Boomers are set to change and transform the concept of training volunteers. To put it concisely, Baby Boomers are not interested in simply 'traditional' training, they are interested in education and learning opportunities that develop their own skills, benefiting themselves and the organisation. Because their time is precious, these learning opportunities must be vital to their volunteering role and 'not just training for the sake of more training'. The education and learning must be relevant, meaningful and above all, well presented. It needs to be based upon opportunities to develop one's full potential rather than about control and regulation and a fear of litigation.

It is not only the amount of training that may be required by an organisation before Baby Boomer volunteers are able to get on with the ‘doing’ – the volunteering, it is also the type of learning and method of delivery of this learning experience that requires careful consideration.

Baby Boomers learn best in open environments of equality between educator and volunteer, as they are often more knowledgeable than those attempting to teach them and do not respond well to the teaching styles of authoritative experts. A training model focussed on the ‘expert’ training the uneducated with a ‘top down’ approach, rather than a model of colleagues learning together, may well contribute to many volunteers leaving in the early stages of their volunteer involvement.

*I didn't mind doing the training but some of it was a waste of time. It wasn't so much that I knew what they were covering but it was being treated like a primary school student that got to me and then I thought, well I just don't need this at all – then during the training I decided no thanks and left and haven't been back (female participant).*

In recent research examining the issues of lifelong learning for mature adults (AARP, 2000:4) it was found that the educational experiences that would most likely appeal included: “subjects that are personally meaningful, taught in environments which provide a direct learning experience, allow adults control over all aspects of the learning process...and the best learning methods engage three of the five senses – seeing, hearing and touching”.

This is not to suggest that Baby Boomers will refuse to undertake training programs in order to become a volunteer – this is not the case. However, the most successful organisations will develop strategies and techniques to continually monitor and evaluate, in consultation with their volunteers, whether the training that volunteers are being asked to undertake is needed, effective, relevant and presented in the most appropriate manner for the learning needs of their Baby Boomer volunteers.



## T is for Time.

Of the seven strategic focus areas identified in this research, issues relating to time were the biggest concern for all Baby Boomer participants in both the focus groups and the creativity sessions.

Mackay (1997) in his book *Generations* defined the Baby Boomers as both the ‘stress and sandwich’ generation. As the stress generation, Mackay (1997:64-71) aptly describes: “indeed it is fair to say that ‘stress’ has become the buzzword of the Boomers...it is inextricably connected in their minds to the idea of busyness and that, in turn, seems to be essentially a problem of time...If Boomers could wave a magic wand over their lives, they would want to reduce stress and the way they would like to do it would be by stretching time – allowing them to continue to do all the things they do, but to do them at a slower pace”.

As the sandwich generation, Boomers are finding life busy and stressful because: “many of them are having their children later than their parents did (especially if it is a ‘second crop’ from a second marriage); their children are staying at home for longer (or leaving and then coming back); and their parents are living longer and therefore requiring care and support. Indeed, one of the emerging cries of Boomers is that they are caught in the middle of caring for two generations at once” (Mackay, 1997:88). The Baby Boomers have well and truly become the generational meat in the sandwich.

Added to this is the concern that the pace of life has speeded up with technology. Technology had promised increased leisure time, a more relaxed lifestyle and less stress. But the opposite has happened. Mobile phones and email have made people instantly contactable. And with both partners often working, Baby Boomers have become ‘time strapped’, feeling they have no time for their children, let alone voluntary work. Without exception, this was a recurring theme across all group participants, whatever age category and in urban or rural locations. All spoke of having a lack of time to do all the things they wanted to do. Only two participants were not involved in some form of paid employment, but also expressed having a distinct lack of time for voluntary activities.

*It's a matter of time really, you just can't fit everything in, you just don't get the time to do all the things you want to do or should do – something has to give* (female participant).

A by-product of the Baby Boomers leading busy, complex and often very stressful lives, is that they are increasingly unlikely to commit to volunteer work for the long term. If organisations are to engage Baby Boomers, particularly those with dependent children at home, they must urgently develop strategies that provide a range of volunteering opportunities that are *short term and time specific*, often with a clear start and finish date. This is certainly a growing worldwide trend and is often referred to as 'short term' or 'episodic' volunteering (Ellis, 1996; MacDuff, 1991; McCurley & Lynch, 1994). It is not that all Baby Boomers don't want to commit for the long term, it is just that an increasing number of them feel they can't.

One of the biggest fears for Baby Boomers, and for many participants this is born of experience, is that when they do actually volunteer, they are then caught in that volunteer role forever.

*Once you put your hand up and volunteer, that's it – you're stuck! It was going to be just a once off helping out and then you're there forever. So you learn next time not to raise your hand when they call for volunteers* (female participant).

The other aspect of this trend is the need for organisations to incorporate strategies to allow for greater *flexibility* in their volunteering opportunities. Baby Boomers are prepared to give of their time, but only if their time is not wasted. They require flexibility in their volunteering opportunities, with organisations recognising that Baby Boomers cannot always volunteer at the same time each week.

*Sometimes you just can't always be there, same time, same place – there has to be flexibility, there wasn't any give and take, so I went!* (female participant).

As Noble (2000:159), confirms: “the days when volunteers continue to work long hours for one organisation as a lifetime commitment are passing, as people live increasingly busy lives, relocate and move from one interest area to another...They will choose an area and activity of interest, rather than a specific organisation”.

Organisations will need to get much smarter at developing strategies that provide Baby Boomers with flexible, short-term and time specific volunteering opportunities so they are able to make significant voluntary contributions without affecting work responsibilities or family commitments. If they enjoy the experience, they are more likely to return again and again for further short term projects.

As a ‘lack of time’ was a major barrier to volunteer involvement, much discussion in the creativity sessions and some focus groups centred around potential strategies. Of the many suggestions to arise, three particular strategies were identified which are consistent with current worldwide trends. Firstly, creating opportunities for *family volunteering* – where non-profit organisations develop volunteering tasks that could involve all members of the family, from the children through to parents and grandparents. This meant that instead of choosing between spending time with their families or spending time volunteering, Baby Boomers were able to combine both needs.

*Our volunteer numbers have increased, we’re finding families coming down to work with us, it’s the type of voluntary work where everyone in the family can pitch in (male participant).*

Secondly, *on-line volunteering* offers the potential to volunteer without leaving home or at work without leaving the desk. This meant that the time taken with travel to and from the volunteering activity could be eliminated and Baby Boomers would still be able to make an important contribution to their community. This would not suit everyone and organisations would still need to develop effective strategies and structures to meet the needs of their on-line volunteers, but many participants in the creativity sessions saw this as a way of the future. As Zappala (2001:45) explains: “as well as the traditional on-site

forms of volunteering, the location where volunteering occurs in the new model is increasingly off-site...and via the Internet”.

Thirdly, participants considered an area of great potential was the opportunity for *employee volunteering*. Private enterprise or public sector employers providing paid release time for employees to volunteer for non-profit organisations was seen as an ideal way to be able to contribute as a volunteer without having to sacrifice limited time with the family or compromising careers. Many participants felt that the government should lead the way in employee volunteering programs (EVPS) with their own staff and that public sector volunteering would provide a useful model for private enterprise to develop partnerships and employee volunteering opportunities with non-profit organisations. Quoting Zappala (2001:45) again: “traditional forms of armchair philanthropy are giving way to corporations’ more strategic involvement in the funding, design and implementation of community-based programs, often through the skills and time that their staff can volunteer through formal employee volunteer programs (EVPs)”.

*I heard a lot about it when I was away, banks, government, corporations all seemed to be getting into to it – it was good for staff morale, good for business and good for the community. We should really give it a go here (female participant).*

Employee volunteering would also allow the busy Baby Boomers in their 40s to undertake volunteer work which interested them, not just child-based volunteer activities, and would allow many in their 50s to have a ‘taste’ of volunteer work they may be interested in pursuing in the future when they ‘scale back’ their paid working life.

It should also be noted that it would be unwise for organisations to sit back and wait until Baby Boomers retire from the paid workforce before seeking to recruit them as volunteers.

There is an increasing array of research and literature suggesting that Baby Boomers may not necessarily 'retire' as such in the traditional sense or have as much 'free or disposable time' as their parents did when they retired (Dychtwald, 1999; Foot & Stoffman, 2001; Quadagno & Street, 1996; Salt, 2001).

One difference that emerged between the four focus groups, ages 40 to 44; 45 to 49 and 50 to 55 years, was that those people in their late 40s and especially in their 50s had begun to look at and plan for future retirement issues. The focus group participants in their early and mid 40s were not at a point in their lives where they had really begun to consider retirement issues in-depth. However, those participants who did speak of retirement, especially the focus group participants aged 50 to 55 years, were all looking at active involvement in hobbies, volunteer work, travel and in some cases part-time work.

*A rocking chair retirement isn't for me. I've got too many things to do – I can't just sit back and do nothing, I'll reckon I'm going to be busier then, than I am even now (male participant).*

This does not mean that as Baby Boomers age they will be less likely to volunteer. Not so, as many Baby Boomers see volunteering as a high priority in approaching retirement. One reason for this is that volunteering has enormous benefits for health and well-being, a fact which would be an important promotional strategy in any recruitment material. Volunteering can assist in combating the three issues that impact on people during their first two years of retirement: (i) dealing with loneliness and the loss of social contacts; (ii) the need to feel that they are contributing and having a sense of belonging; and (iii) developing and engaging in purposeful activities (Longhurst, 2000).

However, Baby Boomers do have a very different view about retirement – they see themselves as taking up new learning opportunities, pursuing travel and hobbies, exploring their creative talents, continuing in part-time employment and of course, volunteering. It will be a time of *transition* rather than *termination*. Baby Boomers will still want to volunteer, but they will just have less time to commit to their volunteer work and will require a greater flexibility in what is being asked of them.

Presently, most organisations are geared towards the regular long term volunteer. The entire recruitment, training, supervision and management structures of most non-profits are aimed at such volunteers. To effectively respond to the Baby Boomer generation, now and in the future, organisations will need to re-develop their strategies so as to meet the needs of the short-term, time-limited volunteer.

As Foot and Stoffman (1997:128) state: “those organisations adept at accommodating this valuable talent when it’s available will reap the rewards”.

### **Other Comparative Research Findings**

This research also provided a limited comparison of several other issues relating to Baby Boomers and Volunteering. These included: urban and rural locations; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities; and age categories of 40 to 44 years, 45 to 49 years and 50 to 55 years.

#### Urban and rural focus group and creativity session discussions.

Overall, there was only a limited difference between the themes and issues raised by Baby Boomers in urban and rural settings. Although Western Australia (outside Perth) has the highest rate of volunteering (45%) (ABS, 2001), there were three issues that warrant further consideration at this time for those in rural/remote locations.

The first issue relates to the obvious concern for rural areas of *distance and isolation*. This is not to say that rural participants wanted to be closer to the urban areas, in fact, it was often quite the opposite.

*We moved here to get away from the city, we are still busy here but it’s a different type of busy, I don’t want to go back to that rushing here and there (male participant).*

What was an issue was that the distance and isolation from urban areas meant that volunteers and organisations were unable to access some of the *resources* that those in

urban areas would take for granted. These included good quality training or learning opportunities – it was felt that these were unable to be accessed because of the time and money involved to travel to urban locations to attend; and the absence of a range of other organisations to which clients could be referred for further assistance.

Strategies to bring learning opportunities to the country areas, rather than the country having to come to the opportunities, are important considerations for rural communities. Technology could well play an important role in both the provision of learning opportunities (e.g., through teleconferences) and in enlisting potential future volunteers through on-line volunteering. Most Baby Boomers in white-collar employment have access to computers and there may be the potential for rural non-profit organisations to develop ways to allow their city cousins to volunteer on-line without leaving their offices or homes (e.g., writing newsletters; remote tutoring of ‘at risk’ youth, etc).

The second issue is about *numbers* of potential volunteers. Because of a smaller population, the rural non-profit organisations have a smaller pool of Baby Boomers from which to attract and recruit potential volunteers as compared to those in urban areas. Further, the demographic composition of the town’s population – whether young people, Baby Boomers or older people or a mixture, had an obvious effect on the pool from which volunteers could be recruited and attracted to various types of voluntary work.

Although the rural locations for these particular focus groups were areas of population growth, many participants in the focus groups commented on and discussed examples of rural areas where population numbers were dropping dramatically and towns were seen as ‘dying’. The social issues of dwindling populations in rural areas and likely solutions for this phenomenon are of course beyond the scope of this current research. However, lack of numbers is a recognised difficulty when attempting to attract and recruit volunteers to organisations in rural/remote areas.

The third issue was one of *support* and is interrelated with the previous issue of numbers. Participants from both the urban and rural groups discussed examples of feeling either supported or unsupported in their volunteer work with organisations. In those examples

where volunteers felt unsupported, a common theme, for all participants, particularly in smaller non-profit organisations, was feeling that they were having to do almost everything. These volunteers may have initially become involved on a limited basis, but had found over time as other volunteers left that they had now taken on more roles, more volunteer work and more responsibilities.

*I feel like I am carrying it all on my shoulders and trying to do everything. And then I feel guilty, if I leave what's going to happen, it'll just all fall apart (female participant).*

Participants in this position simply feel 'trapped'. They believe, and not without some justification, that if they leave, the group or organisation will 'fold' and disappear. Yet if they do not leave or reduce their volunteer involvement they will actually 'burn out' and ultimately be forced to leave through ill health. The intensity of this situation was felt more by rural participants as compared to urban participants. Those in the urban areas who had actually left often found that someone else did step into their 'shoes' and on some occasions several people did so. But those in the rural area did not always have this experience and some saw groups fold after they had withdrawn. There were many reasons for this but often it was because there was just not a potentially large enough pool of potential volunteers from which a successor or successors could be found.

*Every country town I have been to I have started a...group, it has been wonderful for the children but after I have left I've heard that the group has folded, you get so you don't want to start something as you'll be left trying to hold it together, I've had enough of that now (female participant).*

Further, while urban participants may have been discussing the lack of numbers and lack of support in relation to leaving just one organisation or group, rural participants were talking about considering leaving a *number* of organisations and groups. Rural participants were often volunteers for many groups and their leaving had repercussions for not one, but many non-profit organisations in a small country town.



*I know one lady who is involved in 15 committees in the town, she is chairperson for several of them and is a member of the others. When she goes what's going to happen? (female participant).*

An interesting aspect to emerge from the discussions of the rural focus group participants about the issues of decreasing numbers of potential volunteers and a lack of support, was that few rural communities had come together to re-assess and re-evaluate both the degree of duplication of services and the number of non-profits organisations in the town. It may well be a useful strategy for some rural areas to begin to examine how to 'pool' their resources (both material and human) to provide a smaller but more effective number of services, rather than some rural non-profit organisations and groups continuing to struggle on, being run by an ever diminishing pool of volunteers who have become tired, over-burdened and worn-out individuals. A very limited number of country towns have begun this process and the outcomes of these processes should be closely monitored to see if they could have broader application as a strategy to assist a number of other rural areas.

#### Indigenous and Ethnic Communities.

In individual discussions with three representatives from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities who participated in this research, it became obvious that their sense of volunteering was often very different from the ABS (2001:44, op cit) definition of 'a volunteer'. It also became apparent that the terminology and methodology employed by this research were not appropriate for an in-depth investigation of volunteering within indigenous communities and no further research was undertaken beyond these three initial interviews.

The findings from the limited number of interviews did suggest that Aboriginal people are involved in an enormous amount of unpaid work, but it is undertaken on an informal rather than a formal basis through any organisation. This work is undertaken for those within their own Aboriginal communities rather than for those outside these

communities. It is about community good will, helping out your brother and sister and is not defined within indigenous communities as 'volunteering' at all.

Examples of the activities undertaken, as explained by participants, are consistent with some of those identified by recent research (Hearbeat Trends, 2001:21):

- Reconciliation events, meetings, public consultations
- Family support, domestic violence issues
- Youth work
- Delivering groceries to community centres
- Getting programs and services up and running (eg. childcare centres, aged care)
- Mentoring
- Legal advice
- Helping people of the Stolen Generation find their families
- Providing a link between gaol inmates and their families.

It seems there is also an enormous amount of assistance provided on an informal basis by family members to others within their extensive extended families.

*We don't really call it volunteering in our community. It's just something you do. What happens is that the most stable member or members of the family will help out all the others and I'm talking about extended families, there are lot of others to give a hand to, it's their responsibility and they haven't got time for anything else outside (male participant).*

These informal activities, often centred around assisting the extended family, are consistent with examples from a number of other ethnic communities. Individual interviews with paid staff working in ethnic-based organisations support this view. With the vast majority of this work going unrecorded and the informal nature of these activities falling outside the current terminology and measurement methodologies, it was apparent that a different research approach would be needed.

*It does depend on what ethnic group and culture you're talking about, in our culture you just help out all your family, you don't call it volunteering, you'd probably call it your duty (female participant).*

It is suggested therefore, that it would be inappropriate to superimpose many of the previous findings in this report on to the indigenous communities or other ethnic communities, as the findings are more specifically relevant to organisations and formal volunteering processes.

More extensive research focusing specifically on indigenous and ethnic communities would be required and a re-defining of the terminology and measurement of volunteering would be imperative.

Age categories 40 to 44 years, 45 to 49 years and 50 to 55 years focus groups.

Within the age span of 40 to 55 years there was very little comparative difference between the opinions of participants regarding the major strategic focus areas already reported on. The significant issues discussed were broadly similar across both age categories and the geographical locations of participants.

Such comparative differences as there were between age groups seem simply to reflect the participants being at different stages in their lives.

Those participants in their 40s who were volunteers were actively involved in child or family focussed volunteering. In the main, their volunteering was centred around activities outside the home in which their children were involved, especially school based voluntary work such as canteen duty and voluntary work associated with weekend sport and recreation activities. This was the case for both female and male participants and is reflected in the ABS (2001) information with 42% of volunteers 35 to 44 years and 36% of volunteers 45 to 54 years involved in sport and recreation. This declines to 22% in the 55 to 64 year age group.

Even in the 50 to 55 year age group, only those participants whose children had left home or were no longer adolescents were able to start to think about the sorts of activities that they would be interested in being involved with on a voluntary basis.

Perhaps the major difference between those in their 40s and those in their early 50s was that the older age group had begun to focus on their financial position and to think about issues relating to retirement. No participants were considering early retirement at 55 years of age, but issues to do with a future outside full-time employment were becoming a higher priority as the age of the participant increased.

All participants were positive about considering voluntary work in their own full or semi-retirement and all saw such volunteering as being for themselves, not for their children. However, it was only in the 50s age group that thoughts about the actual type of voluntary work had begun to formulate.

Future voluntary work was also related to previous or current experiences of volunteering. If the experience had been a positive one, participants were more likely to express a keen interest in voluntary work in later years. If the experience had been negative, participants were somewhat more cautious in their responses.

## **Summary and Recommendations**

The enormous size of the Baby Boomer population ensures that the non-profit sector can expect to experience a surge in the number of potential volunteers. Volunteering increases with age and the huge Baby Boomer generation is beginning to enter a life stage when their children are grown and leaving home. They may not necessarily 'retire' but will begin to 'scale back' their working life in order to pursue other activities, and they see volunteering as one of these activities.

Those organisations waiting to target the Baby Boomers when they retire will be too late. Baby Boomers are already considering their futures and how they will use their time. By

the time that they eventually do retire (if they do at all), they will already be a long way down the track in planning the activities they will undertake.

The Baby Boomer generation is no less giving than the previous generation in volunteering and intending to volunteer in the future. What is different is that Baby Boomers are more assertive, better educated and more demanding than any generation before them.

Much research exists identifying an array of motivations and reasons for volunteering. Fischer and Schaffer (1993) identified six main motivations for volunteering: altruism; ideology; positive egoistic factors; life cycle; social and leisure; and incentives and rewards.

Heartbeat Trends (2001) in their research describe four categories of volunteers and their fulfillment needs: nurturers (emotional connection and self-worth through nurturing); adventurers (personal growth, being challenged and gaining new skills); socialisers (a sense of belonging through social interaction); and workers (self-worth through being useful and productive).

No matter how motivations or volunteers are categorized or labeled, it is almost a truism to state that there are nearly as many motivations and reasons for volunteering as there are individual volunteers.

This research suggests a different perspective. It found that for Baby Boomers, if the seven strategic focus areas identified in this research by the acronym BOOMNET are not in place, it does not matter what the initial motivations or needs of the volunteer were, they are unlikely to commence or continue volunteer work for that organisation.

Baby Boomers are set to re-shape and re-define volunteering in this State and organisations will need to adopt new approaches and strategies to attract and recruit these Baby Boomers to volunteering. A 'blueprint' of seven strategic focus areas required for

organisations wishing to capture the Baby Boomer volunteer has emerged from this research.

Depending on how organisations adapt, change and respond to the Baby Boomer generation, some organisations will experience ‘boomtime’ as their volunteer numbers soar, and for others it will be ‘gloomtime’!

It is indeed a challenge and many non-profit organisations have already taken up the challenge. Many more will need to do so – for it is a challenge well worth the effort. Organisations will need to consciously direct their efforts towards the seven strategic focus areas discussed in this report if they are going to cast a net that will capture the Baby Boomer volunteers.

It is in line with these challenges that the following recommendations are made in order to translate research into positive action:

1. That non-profit organisations seeking to attract, recruit and retain Baby Boomer volunteers concentrate on the seven strategic focus areas identified in this report under the acronym BOOMNET.
2. That to encourage and support non-profit organisations in seeking to recruit Baby Boomer volunteers, the Western Australian Government fund a pilot project in 2002 based on the findings of this report, with the aim of developing a model of best practice in recruiting Baby Boomer volunteers. The project would assist interested non-profit organisations, selected from different sectors (e.g., welfare, sport and recreation, emergency services, environment, etc) to develop and implement the BOOMNET strategies within their organisations.
3. That a full copy of this report be made available to all interested parties.
4. That a public presentation and workshop be undertaken early in 2002 to present the findings of this report to non-profit organisations utilising volunteers

throughout Western Australia. This presentation and workshop would allow participants to discuss, develop and refine their strategies to respond to the strategic focus areas identified in this report.

5. That the Western Australian Government, in conjunction with non-profit organisations that utilise volunteers, establish a working party to examine the issues surrounding insurance cover and litigation for non-profit organisations.
6. That the Western Australian Government consider adopting a policy of public sector volunteering and the development and implementation of formal Employee Volunteer Programs.
7. That the Western Australian Government, in conjunction with local government, consider commissioning a pilot project in a rural area to examine ways in which organisations and groups utilising volunteers could alleviate their diminishing volunteer base and more effectively 'pool' their resources.
8. That further research be undertaken to specifically examine in greater depth the issues relating to Rural/Remote Communities and Volunteering throughout Western Australia.
9. That further research be undertaken to specifically examine in greater depth the issues relating to Indigenous Communities and Volunteering in Western Australia, with consideration given to the methodology and terminology used in defining volunteering.
10. That further research be undertaken to specifically examine in greater depth the issues relating to Ethnic Communities and Volunteering in Western Australia, with consideration given to the methodology and terminology used in defining volunteering.

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