

## HISTORY OF VOLUNTEERING SA.

In 1982 Mavis Reynolds and Joy Noble, along with a group of other volunteers, were instrumental in establishing the Volunteer Centre of South Australia, now known as Volunteering SA-NT.

Joy had recently retired from a government department where her interest in the concept of volunteering was aroused when given the job of instituting a program to involve volunteers in service provision. Her idea to establish a state volunteer centre began when a friend who had volunteered complained that his skills were not being used and he intended resigning. She had also heard that SACOSS had conducted a survey of community organisations which showed their staff needed training in how to make the best use of the skills and experience of volunteers.

Mavis had recently moved to South Australia from New South Wales where she had had contact with their newly formed Volunteer Centre. She believed South Australia should follow suit.

An acquaintance of both heard them separately suggesting a Centre should be established and urged them to meet and discuss their ideas. They immediately agreed to work together and set about recruiting volunteers among their friends, relatives and neighbours, letting no one escape!

Enough funding was provided by the Co-op Building Society and the Department of Social Welfare to pay six months rental for two tiny rooms at 82 Franklin Street and to purchase second hand furniture and material from a government storehouse. This included the history book. Joy wanted something smaller and more affordable, but Mavis put her hands on it and said "No way!"

Using the word "volunteer" in the title was questioned, as at the time the word evoked a common, though mistaken, concept of volunteering as being the realm of well-off women dispensing charity. Unable to find a more appropriate word, it was used in the title on the understanding that volunteering would be promoted as an activity of choice, covering a wide range of interest areas and involving people from a variety of cultures with different interests, skills and experiences.

Perusal of the early annual reports shows the enthusiasm of the band of volunteers who opened the Centre. The aim was "To present a global view of volunteering which responds to the challenges of today's society". A wide ranging set of objectives as well as policy and practice guidelines were established.

There was no money to employ paid staff, so until a part time worker was appointed after six months, Mavis worked for three days and Joy for two, supported by a skilled and enthusiastic band of volunteers. SACOSS helped in those early years by promoting the Centre and their Executive Director, Lange Powell chaired the first committee of management.

From its inception the Centre offered training in the management of volunteer programs, as well as a Volunteer Referral Service. There was almost no published material on the subject of volunteering in Australia and very little world-wide, so the preparation of policy

and practice guidelines and the publication of material became an early priority. The first book "Volunteer Management: A Resource Manual" was published in 1988, (with the 2010 update published in Arabic), followed by a number of subsequent books. In its second year of operation the quarterly newsletter had a circulation of 800.

The paucity of money contrasted with the Centre's big ideas. The Prime Minister and his wife, Bob and Hazel Hawke, were our patrons in those early years, with a visit by Hazel and reception at the Adelaide Town Hall when the Centre established the first Volunteer Week in Australia. These and many other initiatives were organised by the enthusiastic and united volunteer staff.

There was an immediate response to the setting up of the referral service, and the training sessions were extremely well attended.

Having established its credibility, the Centre was able to raise more income, and after six months employ a part time worker. In those early years much of the income came from the corporate sector, selling publications, membership fees, training courses and consultancies.

As many people who were attending the referral service and training courses were travelling long distances from the outer suburbs, these communities were assisted in establishing their own volunteer resource centres.

The S.A. government was the first in Australia to add volunteering to the portfolio of a Minister when the government Office for Volunteers was established, again an Australian first.

With a clearly defined need for accredited training for Volunteer Managers, the School of Volunteer Management was launched in 1995 and established the Diploma of Volunteer Management. In 2000 Volunteering SA formed a partnership with Onkaparinga TAFE to accredit and deliver training courses. Being a Volunteer Program Manager is now a well-established career option.

In 1997 the office shifted to larger premises at 155 Pirie Street, and then to 220 Victoria Square. In 1984 Marjon Martin was the first Executive Officer employed on a full time basis, and during her tenure until 1996 the organisation grew by leaps and bounds.

Volunteering SA-NT has always been important on the national scene. Apart from its books selling widely across Australia, it was active in the 80's in helping to set up the national body (now Volunteering Australia), and the National Association for Volunteer Referral Agencies (NAVRA), hosting the second National Volunteer Conference and in 1996 initiated the publication of the "Australian Journal on Volunteering" and edited it for the first five years.