



Using volunteers to help strengthen communities in Glen Innes, Panmure and Point England: Jocelyn's story.

Initiative: Tamaki Community Action Research Project

Theme: Volunteer Impacts Integral to Community Building

Jocelyn is a volunteer researcher for Ka Mau Te Wero in Glen Innes, Tamaki Makaurau (Auckland). Ultimately Jocelyn's work will help paint a picture of local strengths and assets. For now, this work has helped Jocelyn build new connections to her community, new friends at work and new confidence in herself at the same time as she has helped build new pathways between Ka Mau Te Wero and different sections of the community. This is Jocelyn's story.

Jocelyn has lived in Glen Innes for 30 years and as a Housing New Zealand tenant is subject to change and the consequent instability felt by many tenants in Glen Innes. Recently, she has been told she must move, but she does not know where she will be moving to yet. Jocelyn identifies strongly with her community and has historically been very involved with a local school walking bus, school jubilee celebrations, Girl's Brigade, and her local church as well as working at the Glen Innes markets. She has an open outgoing personality, is a sole parent and has genuine love for her community. She could be called a local "super connector". The prospect of leaving is unsettling.

Jocelyn started as a volunteer with local charitable trust Ka Mau Te Wero in mid 2011 and, after a training period, she joined a group of 20 volunteers interviewing persons from randomly selected households and identified individuals representing different groups from the community. Working part time with a partner, she interviews 8 or 9 participants a week. She wears a tee shirt uniform and an identity badge. The interviews take 40-50 minutes to complete. Information is gathered to enable an assessment of the strength of connections people have with their community and the interviewers also disseminate information about local resources and groups which can be accessed in their community. It's a two way process with local volunteers, like Jocelyn, who love their community both sharing and gathering information. Jocelyn has the following stories;

- One man from a Muslim family was very happy to be interviewed. Jocelyn says he had a beautiful home but had been robbed and many of his things were hard to replace. During the interview he wanted to keep repeating his story and it was uppermost in his mind. At the end, he asked if Jocelyn could help them. While she was not able to assist directly, he was happy to have talked about it and invited her to interview his mother who does not speak English to be interviewed. Jocelyn learnt that in Muslim culture, only women can interview women. She says she learnt a lot from this family and feels that this immigrant family probably appreciated her visit too.
- Jocelyn also interviewed a man from Burma who was learning English at Selwyn College, his only point of local connection. Jocelyn commented that he will be a great contributor to "our community" and he appreciated the information left with him. His focus was to learn English to further himself and get work. He belongs to a Burmese cultural group and makes carvings for a temple in a nearby suburb.
- The project extends its reach into Panmure and Point England. Jocelyn says she did not go to either place much before. She has noticed there are many elderly lonely people in Panmure and some have tried to extend her visit with cups of tea. She says that she now likes Panmure and would be happy to move there. This is significant for her because it represents a change in her thinking.

Jocelyn now refers to Ka Mau Te Wero as her family, especially since her adult children have left home. The group have lunch together. This is provided and shared at a large table in the Ka Mau Te Wero building at the rear of the Citizens Advice Bureau and community centre. This shared time enables them to debrief about the morning's work. They share stories and code the results in the office for data entry. The camaraderie among the group is obvious. Jocelyn says she takes feijoas to share and others bring baking. The group socialises outside work and organises trips to the theatre together, taking advantage of group discounts. She says they all love their 'get-togethers' and they support each other. She says "*her work always comes first for her*".

Jocelyn says the group of volunteers has an average interview refusal rate of 30% and this can be disheartening. She says sometimes people are fearful and suspicious especially because of the changes initiated by Housing New Zealand, but she can often overcome that initial reluctance. She identifies with them and tells them of her plight. At times, though, she feels sad and sometimes people refuse to be interviewed.

The volunteers participated in a workshop to assist them to write their own learning stories. Jocelyn likes to write and wrote many stories. When asked to select her favourite, she chose the following one which is written in her own words;

"It was just another working day. I went to out with my colleague to do the interviews as my job is research in the community. I grabbed my pack and away we went. We went door knocking to houses that are picked by the computer. They are called random. Some people say yes to be interviewed, some say no. It's all in a day's work. We get used to this.

*This particular afternoon, I knocked on the door. We always stand back from the door as we don't know who they are and vice versa. The door opened, a man appeared and said "Hello, you two angels at my door". Wow, I felt touched by the kind gesture. No one had said that to me before. We said why we have come, and what our research was about. He agreed and inside we went. He said he had been waiting for us. He knew my colleagues, and as a community person, as I am, I felt at ease. Like they say, if the hand fits the glove, or maybe the halo fits the head, then the conversation is easy. We did our interview and recording. We did our goodbyes, we left knowing we've done a good job. For that small time after, that feeling of being on a high, to rushing back to work to tell the coordinator how I was feeling, was truly a blessing. I knew there were not only two angels, but three angels in his house. You know who that was!" **Jocelyn May 2012***

Being called an angel gave Jocelyn personal validation for her work and was a heartfelt experience for her, bringing tears to her eyes as she recounted it. Everyone needs validation and the fact this was so significant for her, strikes a chord. It is her most important story and as such reminds us that when individuals feel validated in their community and in their work within it, there is a consequent positive energy. The more of this energy in a community, the stronger it will be. Jocelyn makes a difference, and other people can make a difference to Jocelyn too. The re-energising cycle that occurs when communities independently support themselves instinctively grows from such moments.



Intent:

The project aims to assess, build and strengthen neighbourhood connections through an interview process involving “footwork” by volunteers undertaking individual home visits and meetings.

Learnings:

- Using warm hearted local volunteers, and caring people who are prepared to travel into the community to interview participants, helps to break down barriers amongst groups in the community as well as between community organisations and different sections of the population. A sound volunteer selection process needs to reflect this.
- Having a purposeful visit to randomly selected residents gives an “entry” that might not otherwise happen. It also gives heightened meaning to the work of the volunteers.
- Interviewing is about asking a lot of questions, but it is also about giving information. Ensuring that giving is part of the interview process shows respect, builds trust and helps get the “foot in the door”.
- The group of volunteers themselves are forging new relationships together and that strong support is an integral part of the process. This strength and sense of belonging is disseminated into the community as the supported volunteers interact with interviewees, and with one another outside of work.
- Jocelyn has learnt much and grown in confidence and as a person while doing this work. In particular she says she knows more about other cultures. It is significant that as a result of going to Panmure to interview people, an area previously unfamiliar to her, she would now be happy to live there.

Outcomes:

- Jocelyn is a local volunteer who loves her community and with the other volunteers, her efforts are integral to the success of the project and Jocelyn’s work is integral to her sense of worth and wellbeing. It’s a two way street.
- The Tamaki Community Action project is ongoing and it is not yet possible to analyse inputted data to provide measurable outputs. Already, however, qualitative outcomes can be recorded as individual stories and these clearly impact at an individual level.
- These stories are illuminating. They demonstrate that the interviews by volunteers are a successful means of encouraging and strengthening community connections both within the project and beyond.
- The fact that the group has developed a strong sense of belonging at Ka Mau Te Wero, supports this valuable work as that “feeling” flows out to the homes visited by volunteer pairs. We can anticipate that the energy and momentum will be building and the inputted data may show this in due course.



Volunteers Imele and Jocelyn outside their Glen Innes office
Story by Jocelyn Leef and Stephanie Burgess

May 2012