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NEWCASTLE
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TIMEBANKING TRIAL – EVALUATION SUMMARY

March 2014

The Timebanking initiative in NSW is one of the largest in the world. The trial commenced in November 2012 and was funded by the NSW Office of Communities. It has broadened the scope of volunteering within NSW communities. While the essence of Timebanking is to connect support to those who need it, the trial has seen the spirit of giving grow to include more than services. The evaluation has demonstrated that Timebanking has forged healthier, happier and more productive individuals and communities. Through refinement and further innovation, Timebanking can continue to grow volunteering and redefine volunteering and what it means to be a volunteer in new ways into the future.

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE TIMEBANKING TRIAL

From the start of the Timebanking trial in November 2012, to December 2013, a total of 4,004 people registered and 1,261 trades took place over 13 months, resulting in 8,000 banked hours. This amounts to 322 full days of volunteering. In total, 227 users were offering volunteer services, 136 were requesting support and 52 were offering and seeking support.

By March 2014, 4,181 Timebanking members have made 1,573 trades, resulting in 9,600 banked hours, and 209 people have offered services since January 2014. This indicates that as users become accustomed to the reciprocal relationships at the heart of Timebanking, their participation and trading increases. Opportunities exist not just for individuals to participate in Timebanking, but also for community based organisations, schools, councils and local businesses to become involved. The trial has seen more than 350 organisations join as members.

Analysis of the trial shows that Timebanking works best at a grassroots level — it is more productive to operate several local sites where neighbours are helping neighbours, than one all-encompassing organisation across a large area. Such local scale is more able to seamlessly contribute to local communities and meet local needs. One third of Timebanking members were new to volunteering which means it attracts new people to giving in this way.

Research suggests that engagement with members who have expressed interest in trading their time but have not yet done so is a vital step towards supporting them to become active members of the Timebanking community. To further extend reach and appeal and to reinforce Timebanking, social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook were harnessed. The indications are that establishing an overarching social media presence, as well as web pages for individual Timebanking pilot sites, will play an integral role in promoting this new form of volunteerism to a generation of digital natives through 2014 and beyond.

Through the trial, it has become evident that Timebanking provides pathways to individuals that may not previously have felt they have a contribution to make in volunteering programs. Those from backgrounds of disadvantage can find opportunities to engage more fully within the community through Timebanking - so that they can discover valued and productive contributions to society. For example - 15% of evaluation survey respondents had found paid

employment through their participation in the Timebanking trial. This establishes the power of Timebanking as a valuable driver of employability and participation.

CHARACTERISTICS OF SUCCESSFUL TIMEBANKING

Through our review of the Australian and international literature, we have discovered several crucial factors that contribute to successful Timebanking. These include dedicated members, outreach to build and sustain new relationships, and effective management. Timebanking can be adapted to suit many settings and circumstances in local communities.

The literature indicates that reciprocity and co-production distinguish Timebanking from traditional modes of volunteering. Reciprocity is mutual sharing of time, care, skills and knowledge, and co-production is the sense of community and mutual support that results from the combined effort of neighbours and local community members. Put simply, Timebanking relies on taking and giving. Without the symbiosis of the two, the system would fail to sow the benefits that make it unique: community self-help, greater social inclusion and increased civic engagement. The labour that people invest in Timebanking contributes to the creation and sustainability of community support systems and social networks that cannot easily be created in other ways. The ability to give, as well as receive from others, creates new relationships of trust.

Effective outreach and management in the form of a broker is useful to Timebanking growth and success. As well as building confidence and credibility, the broker can recruit new members; match the needs of members with the skills of others; build relationships of trust; and weave the social fabric of relationships in Timebanking. The evaluation demonstrates that Timebanking was best managed on a local scale and many brokers were volunteers who supported this management.

Timebanking has the potential to not only establish co-production of new futures in communities, but also other valuable positive economic, social and health-related outcomes. The evaluation indicates that results of this kind depend on the participation of the community in which Timebanking is embedded and so no single formula can be applied consistently across all Timebanking to achieve success.

The Timebanking trial demonstrates that it can be a powerful mechanism for community engagement and increasing volunteering. There is an appetite for such innovation in volunteering that must be further nurtured for its potential to be fully realised. The indications are that the Timebanking trial has successfully furthered all of the NSW Volunteering Strategy strategic directions, particularly in making volunteering more accessible, and broadening the base of volunteers in our communities. Rather than competing with existing volunteering, it extends, strengthens and complements previous approaches. We expect that further Timebanking pilots will evolve community perceptions of volunteering towards a more reciprocal model, that is open to more people, and that fosters the benefits that flow from this innovative approach.

Author: Professor Max Smith, Timebanking evaluation team, Universities of Newcastle and Wollongong

www.timebanking.com.au www.volunteering.nsw.gov.au

