

INVESTIGATING DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO VOLUNTEERING

A Winston Churchill Fellowship

By Emily Wood

The aim of my Fellowship was to see if I could find out how and why attitudes and the level of involvement of volunteering in New Zealand differ to that of the UK.

My aim was to do this by seeing how volunteering was promoted, how volunteers were recruited, to find out why people were involved in volunteering in the first place, and to try to get a snapshot of the general attitude to volunteering.

My background

My whole career has been based on volunteering. I currently work for the BBC in Plymouth, in the South West of England, as a weather presenter. I would not be doing what I do today if it wasn't for the opportunities that volunteering created.

My broadcasting career started on student radio whilst at university in Manchester. When I left university, I moved to Devon with my family. By this point I had decided that radio was what I wanted to do. I wasn't sure how to progress, and being in Devon where there are fewer media opportunities, I felt even more stuck and unsure of what to do next.

I then discovered the local hospital radio station at Derriford Hospital in Plymouth. This was my first involvement with a not-for-profit organisation. I started volunteering there in December 2005 and volunteered for over a year, presenting a show on Saturdays, helping produce a request show during the week, as well as everything else that goes with community organisations such as fundraising and committee meetings.

Not only did I really enjoy my time volunteering at hospital radio, but it also led me to my next step – volunteering at BBC Radio Devon.

One of the other volunteers at hospital radio told me about volunteering at the Community Action Desk at BBC Radio Devon, run by the BBC and the Community Service Volunteers group (CSV). The CSV is a national organisation which had set up an Action Desk at every BBC local radio station. The aim of the Action Desks was to provide a focal point for the community to promote volunteering opportunities and events through their local BBC. There was an Action Desk producer who was employed by the BBC and CSV, but they also managed a team of volunteers who helped with the day to day running of the Action Desk.

So in September 2006 I started volunteering three days a week on the Action Desk. As well as continuing to volunteer at hospital radio and working in the evenings to earn money, it was quite hectic for a time. But the hard work started to pay off – not only did I end up getting some paid work from the BBC, I found my interest and involvement in the volunteer sector also started to take off.

One of the many things I got out of my time as a volunteer was meeting many interesting people and finding out so much about my local community. I worked on campaigns to raise awareness of issues around homelessness in Devon, I helped artists who needed volunteers to make their outdoor sculptures, I met people who volunteered with young people and offered them support when it was lacking from their school or home, I volunteered at a community radio station at a local Arts Centre.

However it was also quite frustrating at times. The daily ‘Helpline’ that we broadcast on Radio Devon seemed to get minimal response, and there always seemed to be more people in need of more people or time or resources than those who had everything they needed to offer a full service to the community.

I was always looking for new ways to get people to look at volunteering and to make people more aware of the opportunities and how rewarding it can be. I was sorting out the post for the Action Desk one day when I came across a leaflet for the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust advertising their Travelling

Fellowships. After noticing that one of the categories for 2008 was 'The Recruitment and Use of Volunteers in the Community' I started thinking about how that applied to what I was doing at the time and how a Travelling Fellowship could not only add to my own experience but also through looking at another culture's approach to volunteering, it might make people in Devon think about volunteering in their community in a different way.

And so my Fellowship adventure began.

Why New Zealand?

When I started thinking about where I could go to look at how volunteering was approached to add interest and perhaps some inspiration to those involved in volunteering in Devon, New Zealand was the first place I thought of.

I had visited the country whilst travelling post-university. I only spent three weeks there, but even in that short space of time I had felt that it was a country which was much closer to its environment and much closer to its community and where possibly volunteering was much more integral to the way of life. When I started to investigate this to put together the initial application for the Fellowship, it seemed like my initial impressions were correct.

I started to contact volunteer organisations in New Zealand via email, to ask them generally about volunteering in New Zealand, what they felt the attitude was towards volunteering there, and for some information on how the volunteering system worked. Below is an example of a reply I received:

From Fairul Ghani at VolunteeringNZ on 6th July 2007:

‘I would say your impression of New Zealanders being more active in their community and environment would be correct. While Volunteering New Zealand (VNZ) is a national body which supports, represents and promotes volunteering in the country, we also work in partnership with 12 regional volunteer centres (each located in major cities around the country with some satellite offices). These volunteer centres play an active role in recruiting volunteers and coordinate volunteer vacancies for local community organisations. They also support the local community by raising volunteer awareness and support the corporate sector by hosting weekly forums on volunteer management, volunteer recruitment and best practice.’

From this I went on to email some of the volunteer centres across New Zealand, who replied in a similar manner. Many of them also offered their

help, time and accommodation if I got to New Zealand in advance of me even getting the Fellowship – a demonstration of the Kiwi generosity I was to meet all the way throughout my trip.

The description of the volunteer centre network appeared to be very similar to how the volunteer centre network operates in Devon. That along with the confirmation of my belief in the integrity of volunteering in New Zealand strengthened my conviction that New Zealand was the place to go. However there were also some other reasons.

Firstly, the culture is similar to the British culture in many ways. New Zealand came under the sovereignty of the British crown in 1840, when many civil societies were already well-established in Britain. These appeared in the colony in set, recognisable forms, providing models for the first colonists to set up charitable organisations.

However, there is also a major difference between Britain and New Zealand. The role of the Māori population is distinctive in New Zealand. Māori have remained an identifiable group, a political force, and their kin-based associations have remained significant while also participating in mainstream society. This interaction between two distinct cultural traditions has had a significant influence on the development of non-profit organisations and attitudes which are unique to New Zealand.¹

Also, New Zealand is similar in terms of landmass compared to the UK, however the population size is very different. Whereas there around 60 million people in the UK, in New Zealand it is closer to 4 million. This, I felt, was bound to make a difference in people's attitude to volunteering and the community.

Finally, the statistics, courtesy of the Office for the Community and Voluntary Sector, part of the New Zealand government's Ministry of Social Development:

- New Zealand is a leading nation in contribution made by volunteers. A recent study of the New Zealand Non-profit sector estimated that volunteers make up **67 per cent of non-profit workforce** equal to 133,799 full time positions, a higher proportion than in any of the other

¹ Margeret Tennant, Mike O'Brien and Jackie Sanders. *The History of the Non-profit Sector in New Zealand*. Wellington: Office for the Community and Voluntary Sector, 2008.

40 world countries participating in the research project. This represents **6.4 per cent of economically active population.**

- More than **one million New Zealanders** are actively involved in volunteer work. Statistics NZ estimated that in the year ended March 2004, there were 1,011,600 who volunteered for one or more of 97,000 non-profit organisations. This represented 31 percent of the population aged 12 and over.
- A **higher proportion of Maori** than non-Maori engage in helping outside the home.²

² <http://www.ocvs.govt.nz/>

What were the aims of the Fellowship?

The aims of the Fellowship were to:

- Get a snapshot of volunteering across New Zealand
- Visit volunteer centres and meet those who work there
- Visit volunteer organisations and meet their managers and volunteers
- To find out the recruit processes to getting volunteers and what is done to keep people volunteering
- To spend some time volunteering myself
- To find out why volunteering is more commonplace in New Zealand
- To look at the influence of the Māori culture
- To look at the similarities and differences between Devon and New Zealand
- To start a discourse on volunteering, with the people I met over there and those I know in volunteering over here
- To find any information which might help volunteer centres in Devon
- To promote volunteering and to make people think about it in a different way

What did I do?

(see Appendix I for full Itinerary)

My plan was to visit as many places as possible, to get a cross section of both urban and rural views on volunteering from the North and South Islands.

Auckland

I started in Auckland at the volunteer centre for Volunteer Auckland. The centre was next to a church on the outskirts of central Auckland, which I found slightly difficult to find. When I did find it, there was a very warm welcome into a centre of activity. I met Cheryll Martin, the centre manager and a couple of her co-workers, one part-time paid assistant and two volunteers, and their accountant, who was volunteering his time.

Cheryll had worked at the centre for fourteen years. She had started as a volunteer herself and after six months was asked to become manager. It covers the largest area in terms of population out of all the volunteer centres, with half a million people within the six 'district' councils in Auckland, although 80-85% of clients are from Central Auckland area, as that is where the centre was based. At the time there was three week wait for appointment to speak to someone at the volunteer centre.

The main issues for Cheryll were time and funding. Time in terms of how much was spent in writing reports and dealing with six different district councils, each with different levels of support for volunteering and differing individual agendas. With funding, Cheryll felt there was not enough government support as it fluctuated from year to year. Also, she wanted to open satellite offices in each district, to ensure a physical presence which is important for promotion of volunteering and would take the pressure off the Central Auckland centre. However there were frustrations as the success of the scheme would be dependent on the wealth and priorities of the district, for example the North Shore was a wealthier area so may be the first, but it would be more difficult in other areas.

At the time Cheryll was also looking into copying an idea from the Nelson and Wellington Volunteer Centres. They had made an A4 ringbound photo book of personal testimonies from volunteers, covering a range of ages and opportunities. Cheryll was planning on using a volunteer student to complete project for Auckland, which would provide more material for her to promote volunteering to more people.

Cheryll also gave me literature to read, including *Volunteering NZ and the Office for Community and Voluntary Sector - The 'Promoting Generosity Project'* and *How Do New Zealanders Give? Towards an understanding of generosity in Aotearoa/New Zealand'*. These were published as part of the Focus on Generosity series initiated by the Office for the Community and Voluntary Sector. Also, since 2005 New Zealand has been participating in an international comparative non-profit research programme, initiated by the Center for Civil Society Studies at John Hopkins University, Baltimore. This has led to the publication of several specialised working papers by the Committee for the Study of the New Zealand Non-profit Sector, in collaboration with the Office for the Community and Voluntary Sector, which highlight key aspects such as the history of the sector and the comparisons with elsewhere. All these papers I found very useful to give me more of an insight into volunteering in New Zealand.

Day of visits around Auckland

Strategic Pay Review

Cheryll very kindly organised for me a day of visiting various places that use volunteers around Auckland. To start the day we attended a Strategic Pay Review, which was attended by managers of various non-profit organisations in Auckland. It was led by David Shannon, who had worked for International Aid in Iran and for a foster charity in Nepal and was now working to advise the voluntary sector on how to create salaries with direct comparison to commercial sector, as non-profit sector pay was generally equivalent to 85% of corporate sector.

Not only did the meeting disseminate useful information, but was also good chance for people within the sector to meet others who might have same issues, and for me it was a chance to meet more people. For example, Cheryll introduced me to Mary-Jo who works for 'Project K', doing in-school community work with children under the 'Kiwi Can' banner, teaching 'can do' attitudes to infant school children.

For Cheryll it was also useful as she also runs volunteer management workshops at the volunteer centre.

Shanti Niwas - Diwali celebration

Next stop was to a community centre where an organisation called Shanti Niwas was holding a Diwali celebration.

Shanti Niwas is completely run by volunteers to provide drivers, meals and community activities once a week for the elderly Indian community in Auckland, including all including physically and mentally disabled, to help them get out of the house and into community. They used between twenty and thirty volunteers over the course of a week, helping approximately two hundred seniors.

Once a year they do a big volunteer thank you event, which also coincides with Diwali. It was also attended by Auckland City Council representatives and sponsored by the council.

The hall was full of around two hundred people, there was dancing, performing and singing performed by young and old, and lunch provided and cooked by volunteers. The organiser of the event told me it was a key show of gratitude to those who organise and help through Shanti Niwas. Members of the Chinese community also performed.

I was mentioned as a 'guest of honour' at the ceremony, which was a lovely moment. They were very appreciative of the support from the volunteer centre, and to Cheryll for bringing me along to highlight their work.

It was a really special visit, such a strong community event by an organisation which provides a very straightforward service in many ways, but obviously makes such a difference.

Eden Gardens

In the afternoon we visited a disused quarry which had been transformed into garden. Speaking to the volunteer manager there, she told me that the garden covered five and a half acres, with only one part-time gardener, so volunteers were very important to them. They have about twenty five volunteers who

work there over the course of a week, but were looking more for regular volunteers. They did have a core of well established volunteers, including a retired English couple who told me it was like a giant garden of their own.

The volunteers also seemed to take great pride in their work, which they saw as long term investment in the garden, which they saw as partly theirs. This feeling of ownership was probably key in keeping the long term volunteers coming back.

SPCA

To end the day we visited one of the branches of the Society for the Protection of Animals and met one of the volunteer coordinators.

This was a much bigger organisation compared to the others I had visited so far. The SPCA was in its 125th year and had 52 centres nationally. Being a high profile national organisation meant they were much less reliant on the volunteer centre for getting new volunteers, but it still had a relationship with them and it was still important for them to be on the volunteer centre's books.

In the Auckland branch they had sixty paid staff and over 700 volunteers throughout district. For such a large operation it was a non-stop recruitment of volunteers, however volunteering was often a starting place for their paid staff.

A majority of their volunteers found out about volunteering through their website and also through word of mouth.

The main problem for them was finding people to volunteer on week days. There were many people available at weekend, but these were often younger so retention was often difficult. There was also sometimes issues between paid staff and volunteers in terms of the division of labour and who was responsible for what.

She also told me they had quite a large application form for the volunteers – this was done to weed out those wanted to volunteer there simply because they 'don't like people', the job involved working with people as well as animals!

In terms of young people, they generally only recruited 18+, although they did consider 16+ case by case. They did have a 14+ with parent scheme set up, but that didn't really work. There can also be Health and Safety issues with younger

people.

However, they did also run a special scheme for school children in the school holidays, so younger people could still get involved with volunteering with animals. They also worked with St John's to set up a pet therapy scheme, which involved outreach to people in residential homes with their rescue animals.

To encourage more weekday volunteers, they had set up a Weekday Volunteer Programme, which involves the same orientation but less commitment as people only had to commit to one hour a week. There was also a dog walking scheme for parents and they often get mothers who want to get involved whilst children were in day care.

She also emphasised the importance to them of refresher courses and ongoing training. For them, the successfulness of a volunteer was often dependent on the individual's personality.

Hamilton

I then travelled to Hamilton, a large university town about 80 miles south of from Auckland. I was staying with Jane Strachan who was not only the mother of a friend of mine that I had met on my last visit to New Zealand, but she had also volunteered with Volunteer Services Abroad and worked at the University of Waikato in the city.

Jane embodied the generous New Zealand spirit by welcoming me into her home, feeding me and helping me recover from my jet lag. It was also very rewarding talking to her about her volunteering experience. It was a chance reading of a newspaper and spotting an advertisement by the VSA that led to her deciding to apply for a volunteer role in Vanuatu, one of the Solomon Islands. Her work at the university is involved with educational leadership, social justice, gender, women, policy development and Pacific education. The role advertised by the VSA was to advise the government of the Solomon Islands on national education and women's human rights policy development and research. For Jane, this seemed to be the perfect role for her. Although the role meant living on the Islands for several months of a time, there were other volunteers she befriended there and is now directing a long term partnership project with the School of Education in the Solomon Islands.

Jane also introduced me to her friends and colleagues Joyce and Michael, who

worked in the Social Sciences and Community programmes at the university. Talking to them gave me another angle on the New Zealand volunteer sector.

Joyce had an MA and PhD focusing on adult education and community, social justice and activism, grass roots and voluntary organisations. Micheal was involved in adult education and trade union involvement, mainly adult education of workers involved with the unions. He also worked with the Community Trust, a regional endowment fund which gives grants to organisations. The main aim of the Trust was to build sustainable organizations, as well as effective grant making, promoting volunteers, also to help with bail outs for struggling organisations over three umbrella trusts – sports, social services and arts.

Joyce and Michael offered me a wealth of information from their experiences not only of researching and teaching, but also from their practical involvement in non-profit organisation.

One of the things they explained to me was how volunteerism was becoming more and more an imposed concept. Maori just see it as 'family' so there were difficulties with quantifying how much 'volunteering' was actually taking place and there was growing pressure to document all volunteering opportunities by government.

Another issue they mentioned were sometimes a lack of cooperation between apparently similar groups, such as environmental organisations and the Department of Conservation. There also seemed to be an increasing emphasis put on accountability for non-profit organisations, a 'neo-liberal' model of contracting for services, rather than funding simply for doing good.

They also explained to me issues around paperwork, Health and Safety and discrimination all putting extra pressure on non-profits, as well as the employment law as employer responsibilities also extended to volunteers. Apparently, most cases to do with disputes under the employment law were with voluntary or semi-voluntary organisations.

This responsibility could be seen as scaring off volunteers, as well as the shift to a more funder driven market and higher levels of professionalization expected, where there were increased criteria to meet under accountability and diversity, with volunteerism to fall evenly across the whole community.

I also asked them about the Māori community. They explained that for Māori it

was an unquestioned responsibility, in the Waikato region around 3000 Māori did between twenty and fifty unpaid hours a week in their community. There was also two types of voluntarisms for them – from pakeha (white New Zealanders) and the Māori to Māori side.

In terms of biculturalism, there was some Māori presence south of Tauranga (on the north east of the North Island), but the influence changes with the racial mix. In general thought, Māoridom was getting stronger as an influence and more organisations were having to incorporate this, which was at times an additional confusing demand.

Joyce and Michael's work within and study of the social sector gave me a really interesting insight into the New Zealand non-profit sector. They were very knowledgeable about how it was changing, and how there were now and ever increasing pressure and issues – but that it still seemed a strong sector.

Tauranga - Western Bay of Plenty

My next stop was to head west to a town called Tauranga in an area known at the Western Bay of Plenty. Here I stayed with Beverly Rudd, the volunteer centre manager. It was a much smaller community and had a very different feel to Auckland. There seemed to be a very relaxed way of life in the smaller community – I meet all of the Western Bay of Plenty board members at a barbeque at Beverly's on the Sunday night including Maggie, who managed volunteers at local hospice and had helped it to expand, Christina who worked at the local polytechnic and was from Germany and had wanted to volunteer to meet people after she had first moved here and June and Colin who were also involved with Rotary and Lions club.

There seemed to be many examples here of when some volunteering then leads to other roles – but in a small community it was also often the same people in control of many aspects in same community. There was also a great pride in the history of volunteering, but still some opportunities for younger people to come through, although seemed quite different in some of it's approaches to the bigger cities with larger student populations.

Day of visits

Beverly organised visits for me around the local area, which included some

hands-on volunteering!

Breakfast Club

The day started at 7am at Merrivale School in Tauranga. The school is in the lowest social 'decil' and the pupils were mainly Māori and Pacific Island children. I was there to volunteer at the Breakfast Club, which set up by Jan Pryce at Red Cross. There were 26 similar schemes across region.

We served breakfast to 47 children before 9am. There were four other volunteers who were not linked to the school; it was self-managed through the Red Cross and Rotary.

The children were not given breakfast until they had washed their hands and said please and thank you. The volunteers seemed to know the children well, it was a good social time for them, and a couple of the teachers popped in. Some of the volunteers explained to me if it wasn't for the Breakfast Club, many of the children we saw would not have eaten anything before school. Talking to the head mistress Jan Tineiti, she explained that the school could not survive without volunteers.

Riding for Disabled (based just outside Tauranga)

Next we visited Riding for the Disabled, a non-profit organisation which provided therapeutic riding for disabled people of all ages.

I spoke to Rachel who was the funding manager. She explained they were having difficulties in raising funds, the current contribution was \$5 a ride but they faced having to increase fees for survival.

They did have 70 volunteers a week, but that had gone down to 30, so they were currently on a big push to get more, through advertising in paper as well as using the to volunteer centre.

One of their main issues was needing volunteers to commit for set days to know how many rides they can facilitate. The volunteer duties also involved quite a lot cleaning, but they also received a lot of training for working with riders.

There was a large age range of volunteers, although there appeared to be

mainly female volunteers when I was there. One of the other main benefits for volunteers was they also get riding lessons themselves, to progress and get more experienced.

And despite needed to commit to set times, they was flexibility for volunteers within the roles that they did. They could choose to work with more remedial or more intensive riders, some of which required four or five volunteers per rider.

While I was there I chatted to young Danish girl called Jaine, who used to work with horses in Denmark. After moving to New Zealand, she wanted to volunteer as her partner's job meant to work, so she volunteered there three days a week, the best thing for her was seeing the look on riders' faces when on the horse.

The 'community village' in Tauranga

We then returned to the Community Village in Tauranga, where Volunteer Western Bay of Plenty was based. They were many non-profit organisations based within the village, so I dropped in to a couple of organisations. It was also very handy for the Volunteer Centre to direct people to specific organisations which were nearby.

Prisoners Aid and Rehab

I spoke to manager Kerri Ann, who explained that her main issues was funding. Also she has had to change to a more fluid role, to keep up with the changes in accountability and the governance of organization. She also struggled to get volunteers for the committee, to keep people and to get them to be active.

The aim of the organisation is to help families, drive them to prison for visits etc., for free or minimal cost. They needed their volunteers to be very open minded and non-judgemental and it could be difficult to get the right people. Kerri Ann explained it was sometimes extra hard for that particular type of volunteering due to involvement with difficult social issues, but they need to have a clean record to volunteer and often used ex-offenders as volunteers to fill the void.

She mainly recruited through volunteer centre and with court workers. Also

with the university, they would get student on placements which often lead to longer term involvement.

Budget Advisory Service (also within Community village)

Interviewed the manager Marjorie, who was very energetic, dedicated, enthusiastic, and passionate about what she does.

They has 22 volunteers budgeters, the management committee requires 30 volunteers, as well as 7 part time staff and 1 full time manager. They saw 700 new clients per annum, as well as 400 carried over from previous year.

BAS gives free budget advice to families from those at crisis point to money management programme. It is an advocate along with the Inland Revenue, in court, over tenancy etc., it can help with negotiations and is also there to educate = they employ a community educator which also helps to raise their profile.

They were generally looking for long term volunteers, the aim is to retain volunteers due to the training involved. Marjorie explained they were often specifically looking for older people – as they are more reliable and the training requirement is fairly intense and are supervised for 3 months in the field. Volunteers had to pay a \$50 bond which is returnable after a year, but they get annual retraining and although it was quite strict, they were getting skills, experience, support and appreciation (which Marjorie highlights as being very important – for example they were given free dinner at AGM and a certificate of competency). The BAS has a national body for training, which trained volunteers to federation service level standards and were looking for practical and understanding people, not just bank managers.

The volunteers there are mainly budgeters, working in the centre. The paid staff run the organisation or work from home and run clinics in the community. To her volunteers are important because they bring their own skills, offer practical and active help and are there because they **want** to help people.

The Stewart Centre

This was a residential care home which had volunteer helpers. I spoke to Helen who was a nurse but also volunteered there in running various workshops, which added extra skills to her CV.

She explained that the volunteers they were looking for were ones who would bring their own skills, for woodwork, Tai chi etc, to teach the residents something.

They also had a business partnership with the local Body Shop. Workers from there would take it in turns to visit on Tuesday afternoons, helping out with activities and befriending residents as part of a corporate scheme. We visited the girls in the shop, who said they really enjoyed it, was nice to do something different, and also to spread to responsibility amongst all of the staff made it a bit easier.

Networking event

We finished the day with a networking event between 5.30pm to 7.30pm at a community art centre in Tauranga. There were various groups from both the volunteer sector and the arts community. There was a presentation on website design and how to make the most of it by company called Zeald, also a good networking event, and I was impressed by how non-profit organisations were not seen as 'charitable' but as valid organisations in the arts sector as well as the non-profit sector.

Wellington - VOLUNTEERING CENTRE CONFERENCE AND VOLUNTEER NZ AGM

Next stop – the capital city. The whole volunteer centre network meets up on a regular basis in various places around the country, however when it is the VolunteerNZ AGM, which takes place in Wellington, the volunteer centres also hold a two day conference there. I was fortunate to be invited to attend the AGM and the conference, which meant I got to meet volunteer centre managers and committee volunteers from every region of New Zealand, and make further contacts for the rest of my trip.

The VolunteerNZ AGM took place on the evening before the conference. Here I got to meet Tim Burns, director of VolunteerNZ and also see a talk from a team who were working on a social networking site for non-profit organisations that VolunteerNZ were interested in using for themselves and the volunteer centre network.

Volunteer Centre Conference

This took place over two days in a church hall in Wellington. This allowed for lots of time for discussion of issues, sharing of ideas, and plans for the future, and well as socialising.

The day started by singing a Karakia, a Māori prayer or blessing. My Māori pronunciation wasn't very good (neither was my singing!) but it was an uplifting and unifying way to start the day, and demonstrated how much Māori culture has entered the mainstream in New Zealand

There were introductions from all the volunteer centres and a brief update from the centres. Some of the highlights including Louise Lee from the Board of Volunteer Wellington who works on business and community sector relationships giving a talk on the role of brokers. Also Susie from Volunteer Otago explained how they got a volunteer youth coordinator. This was of particular interest to the other volunteer centres as they often have no available time or resources to look at youth volunteering specifically. Susie explained how they wrote out a proper job description and got funding for a year's salary from support fund and local council and charities.

Through that process they employed Lani, who had a degree in film and an MA in education, who was very creative and enthusiastic (and for me, I have to say, although all the other people I had met were wonderful, it was lovely to meet someone nearer my own age!). The aim of the youth coordinator was to recruit volunteers as well as community organisations and groups that will use them. So they set up a mobile library unit at the university and polytech in Dunedin for student community involvement and set up a programme for during school holidays, which meant children volunteering for 8 hours for 3 days in a row. This programme was set up to give 'tasters' of different types of volunteering, the children got a certificate at the end and half of the children from the programme now volunteer on a weekly basis. They felt the key thing for the success of the programme was letting the young people decide what they were interested in themselves— self advocacy. They also introduced them to different and interesting volunteering, like painting murals, art activism – something different and interesting - to give a sense of self belonging.

Another highlight for me was hearing about the latest Volunteer Centre to open - Volunteer Mid North. It was the first western style volunteer 'centre' to open in a Māori community, it opened on 16th September 2007 and was seven

years in the making. Two hundred people attended the opening ceremony. The manager Bella told me one of her main concerns was that it was such a deprived area – one of her volunteers on the breadline herself, but was still volunteering. However, she had great hopes for the positive impact of the volunteer centre.

Some of the issues that were raised included:

- Conflict between national and local volunteer organisation:
For funding – some can only go to national groups, want to go to regional for Volunteer Awareness Week
For management – autonomous, but working alongside, implementing their national campaigns
- Issues with collaboration – often similar groups in the same area competing for the same dollar
- Health and safety issues with working with youth volunteers – VNZ looking into research
- Kiwi way – too humble. Need to push selves out more, shout about what they are doing – look into high profile person to advocate volunteering
- Ideas – for working together, all bring own skills, new and old centres.

Another benefit of attending the AGM and conference was that being in Wellington, which is also the centre of government, meant I got to meet with Kat Paton, Senior Policy Analyst at Office for the Community and Voluntary Sector.

That was another thing which struck me about New Zealand – the closeness of the government to the actual people they are working for and with. All it took was one phone call from Tim Burns, the director of Volunteer NZ, to arrange the meeting, and before I knew it I was in a pub in Wellington with a Senior Policy Analyst (and Cheryl from Volunteer Auckland, who was friends with Kat and wanted to come along to say hello!). Talking to Kat about this, she said that as New Zealand is a smaller country, everyone is much closer to government, so it is much more accessible and generally have a closer and more open relationship.

The main areas the OCVS were looking into at that time were:

- Consistency across government

- Inconsistency in data – census question (very general) vs Time Use survey
- Focusing on ‘promoting generosity’ - not just in time, but also money, resources, knowledge
- To get government agencies to look at own policies it considering expenses – labour, conservation
- Getting government employees to volunteer – looking at HR policy, taxes on wages – to get a justification for volunteering in work time

Kat also gave me some more of the literature that the OCVS produces on volunteering along with the Committee for the Study of the New Zealand Non-profit sector. Kat also explained that it’s much more of a grass roots approach in NZ. In UK, they can have a much bigger approach as they have more money, but this doesn’t necessarily mean a bigger impact.

Christchurch

I then travelled down to the South Island and flew into Christchurch, the largest city on the South Island, in the region of Canterbury. Here I was staying with Mary Woods, who had done a Winston Churchill Fellowship travelling from New Zealand to the UK, via Canada, to look at volunteering. This led to her quite literally writing the book on volunteering in New Zealand. She had heard about my visit through her place on the board at VolunteerNZ and had got in touch with me and invited me to stay at her house. Mary offered me much invaluable advice, counsel, guidance, help, as well as food and lifts into town.

Days of visits

Mary also helped with some of her contacts to set up visits for me in the local area.

Volunteer Canterbury

Based in the centre of Christchurch in a Community House, Volunteer Canterbury had a good ‘street presence’ and being in a building with other volunteer organisations made it very accessible and easy to liaise with others.

The manager Ruth Gardner explained to me that they had a long-standing relationship with the local Māori iwi or tribe – even though the Māori population was smaller here compared to some areas of the North Islands, it was still an important part and influence on the volunteering community.

She also told me how the biggest change they had seen was the website and the increase in online registration referrals- half of the enquiries now came through the website. This meant a real change in the Volunteer Centre, as they were conducting fewer interviews with potential volunteers, so employed fewer volunteers themselves.

Ruth also explained to me how they used a variety of methods to advertise their volunteer vacancies – they wrote newspaper articles to attract higher skilled people, but also used community notice boards and the local community radio station to advertise a greater number of vacancies at once.

Christchurch Cathedral

This appeared to be seen as quite a prestigious volunteering role. The cathedral had volunteers which helped in the shop and as tour guides. Only a third of the volunteers actually worshipped there, for many it was more a central point of the community.

I met Nicki, who was the volunteer coordinator there, who explained they had around two hundred volunteers on their books at any one time. She introduced me to some of the volunteers working that day. I met Betty, who was an ex-nurse and had started volunteering at the court through Friends of the Court. She had received the Queens Service Medal for her work there, and had wanted to do something different so started volunteering at the cathedral. Ann had started her volunteering through Volunteer Service Abroad. She had been a teacher, but didn't want to stop teaching, so went to Tanzania to volunteer as a teacher. When she was in New Zealand she volunteered every week as a guide in the cathedral. I also spoke to a lady who was working in the shop and she had been volunteering in the cathedral for thirty years. For her, it was the social aspect, the people which kept her coming back, as well as 'having something to do' – she felt it was very important to have a structure to your life.

Toy library

One of the other volunteers I met at the cathedral was a lady called Marjorie, who also volunteered at a local toy library. She offered to take me there to have a look around and meet so more volunteers (more Kiwi generosity!). The toy library had started out to help children with special needs in a class at a local school. It had been so popular it now occupies its own building.

I spoke to a lady called Heni, who had been volunteering as a buyer for the toy library for thirty years. Her own child had spina bifida and she found there were no suitable toys in New Zealand – they had to be imported. The toy library gave access to parents with special need children to toys they might not be able to afford.

They also had a paid part-time play adviser, who helped parents with home visits, took toys to the families if they couldn't make it to the toy library themselves.

When I visited, there were five volunteers on duty. Their main roles were to repair, wash, clean and sort the toys. It did seem to mainly be older volunteers – Marjorie had been volunteering there for many years herself. But she explained to me one of the most rewarding things about the volunteering there was seeing the families regularly, and seeing the children go up. It was very social work, and they received much appreciation from the families which used the service.

Dunedin

I then travelled to my final destination, the city of Dunedin right on the southern tip of the South Island. It is the principal city in the region of Otago, which is a mainly rural region, and home to the University of Otago.

Volunteer Otago

Another volunteer centre set up in a community house similar to that of Volunteer Canterbury. Dunedin gives the impression of being quite a liberal city, laidback, a bit different to the rest of New Zealand – being so far away from the rest of the country, and the university is also a big influence. Also,

being such a rural region, conservation and the environment is quite high profile in the area.

Volunteer Otago also had a youth volunteer coordinator – as mentioned at the volunteer centre conference. Lani introduced me to some of the organisations she worked with, including Youthline and Rape Crisis.

We also met up with a Department of Conservation volunteer. We went to a local beach where he checked on the local seal and penguin population, and made notes of any significant events or issues, also took guided parties. The chances of spotting one were quite slim – and the trek up and the down the sand dunes to get to the beach was pretty immense – but we did see a yellow-eyed penguin walk out of the sea – and then walk back in again. But to see one of the world's rarest penguins was very special and as the DOC volunteer said, that is why you do it.

We also visited Orokonui Ecosanctuary, a local conservation site just outside Dunedin which was enclosed by a highly-specialised fence, two metres tall and ten kilometres long. The idea of the fence was to allow native Kiwi wildlife to flourish without the threat of pests like possums. I visited when they had just completed making it a pest-free zone, and were looking for more volunteers to help maintain the area through planting, weeding, track work, pest monitoring, fence monitoring, small building projects and administration. The manager there told me that volunteers are provided with supervision, occupational health and safety guidance and any equipment and materials needed. It's a great way of finding out what's happening behind the fence, learning new skills and meeting other people with similar interests, while gaining satisfaction in contributing to a project that will benefit many generations in the future. Conservation of native Kiwi wildlife – much of which is threatened with extinction with the invasion and proliferation of introduced mammals like ferrets and cats.

What did I find out?

I found out:

- There are many similarities behind the reasons why people volunteer from one side of the world to the other; for wanting to help others, because they or their family always have, because they want to meet people, because they want to help their local community, because they want to gain new knowledge or skills, because they want to share their knowledge or skills with others
- The issues for those working in the non-profit are the same the world over. Funding, support from local councils, enough time to achieve everything they want to/everything that is expected, for those who manage volunteers a wage which reflects that of the corporate sector, enough resources to fully support volunteers and other non-profit organisations. All these issues will become increasingly significant as pressure on the non-profit sector continues to grow in the current economic climate, with tighter availability on funding but also more unemployed people turning to voluntary work.
- The importance of volunteer centres and volunteer centres working as a network. I think having a local focal point for people who are thinking about volunteering, who are volunteers, and for the volunteer organisations, is hugely important and beneficial to the non-profit sector. For offering support, advice, expertise, sharing ideas and knowledge, a volunteer centre network is invaluable.
- The influence of the Māori culture is significant, important and unique to New Zealand. The idea of kinship (within *whanau* and *iwi*, family and wider tribe) and helping those within those groups and those communities whenever needed, is an integral idea to the Māori culture. So much so, they don't have a word for 'volunteer'. A study by the Office of Community and Voluntary Sector into Māori perspectives on volunteering came up with an alternative term: mahi aroha. Mahi aroha is defined as:

‘work performed out of love, sympathy or caring, rather than for financial or personal reward’³

The feeling that each person in a community has a duty of care, and that it is not an ‘obligation’ is a very powerful idea. It has something which has stayed with me since my time in New Zealand, and those which I have spoken to in the volunteer sector here since my return, so it must undoubtedly also have an influence on others in New Zealand.

- The New Zealand government works much more closely with the people it works for so communicates much better, and gives the people much better access to its services by it being more open – as demonstrated by my meeting with Kat Paton from the Office for Community and Voluntary Services.
- That the government investing money and time in research projects and publications relating to the non-profit sector increases awareness of the importance of the sector, but in New Zealand’s case especially, can instil a sense of pride and allows for a celebration and recognition of the history of volunteering in a country.

Overall conclusions

That volunteering, the world over, is essentially the same. Whatever you call it, it happens through the generosity of people. It is something which is often taken for granted, whichever culture it is happening in, but if it didn’t happen, it would be sorely missed.

For me, sometime I feel that there shouldn’t have to be ‘volunteers’ – if people are giving up their time, shouldn’t they be rewarded for it financially? But then I also know, from my own experiences as a volunteer, in this country and in New Zealand, and everyone I spoke to on my Fellowship, that there is something inimitable about the work you choose to do as a volunteer. It is that choice you make to do it which adds an enjoyment and satisfaction which cannot be reciprocated in paid work.

³ *Mahi Aroha: Māori Perspectives on Volunteering and Cultural Obligations*. Office for the Community and Voluntary Sector: April 2007

Acknowledgements

The Winston Churchill Memorial Trust – for giving me this wonderful opportunity which has added so many people and experiences to my life – special thanks to Julia Weston for her support via email.

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Volunteer Centres in Devon – especially Ellie Ricketts and Emily McCarthy at Exeter Volunteer Centre and Billie Burnett at Tavistock Volunteer Centre

My colleagues at BBC South West in Plymouth, especially the BBC Devon Online team for helping to update my online diary.

And finally, my family and friends for their ongoing support, advice and lifts to the airport.

APPENDIX I

ITINERARY:

Saturday 18th October: Fly from Heathrow to Auckland

Monday 20th October: Arrive in Auckland

Tuesday 21st October: Meet Cheryll Martin at Volunteer Auckland.

Wednesday 22nd October: Visiting volunteer organisations around Auckland

Thursday 23rd October: Travelled to Hamilton to stay with Jane Strachan

Friday 24th October: Visit the University of Waikato with Jane, meet her friends who worked in the Social Sciences and Community programmes at the university.

Saturday 25th October: Travelled to Tauranga

Sunday 26th October: Met the board of Volunteer Western Bay of Plenty at a barbeque at the house of volunteer centre manager, Beverly Rudd

Monday 27th October: Visit around the local area, including the village of Kati Kati and Te Puna Quarry Park

Tuesday 28th October: Day of volunteering, starting at 6am at Breakfast Club at local school, finishing at 5.30pm at a volunteer networking event.

Wednesday 29th October: Fly to Wellington, Volunteer NZ AGM.

Thursday 30th October: Volunteer Centre Conference in Wellington

Friday 31st October: Volunteer Centre Conference in Wellington

Saturday 1st November: Tourist day around Wellington

Sunday 2nd November: Fly to Christchurch to stay with Mary Woods, who did a Churchill Fellowship to the UK to look at volunteering

Monday 3rd November: Volunteer Awareness Day, lunch at local hospice, meeting at Volunteer Canterbury

Tuesday 4th November: Visits around Christchurch including toy library and the cathedral

Wednesday 5th November – Saturday 8th November: Road trip across the South Island with friend from previous visit to New Zealand

Sunday 9th November: Arrive in Dunedin

Monday 10th November: Meeting at Volunteer Otago

Tuesday 11th November: Visits around local area, including native scrubland conservation and yellow-eyed penguin spotting.

Wednesday 12th November: Fly to Auckland

Thursday 13th November: Day of visits, including Auckland Museum

Friday 14th November: Flight home

Saturday 15th November: Arrive back in UK

APPENDIX II

An article I wrote for the BBC Devon website before my departure



Features

You are in: [Spotlight](#) > [Features](#) > [V for Volunteering - Emily's Churchill Trust adventure](#)

V for Volunteering - Emily's Churchill Trust adventure

One of Spotlight's weather presenter Emily Wood is travelling around New Zealand for four weeks looking at volunteering, thanks to funding from the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust. Emily explains how the project came about:



Emily volunteering at a tree nursery

My first involvement with volunteering was at university with student radio, although I never really saw it as 'volunteering'. It was more a chance to have a go at something different, which just meant giving up some of my time.

I absolutely loved it, and after finishing university I wanted to continue my involvement with radio. After moving to Devon I started volunteering at the hospital radio station at Derriford in Plymouth.

Through hospital radio, I then found out about volunteering at BBC Radio Devon with the Community Service Volunteers group.

The CSV ran a Community Action Desk at Radio Devon, manned by volunteers to advertise volunteer vacancies and promote community campaigns.

I worked on the Action Desk for three days a week. While I was there I found out about the Winston Churchill Trust Travelling Fellowships.

The Churchill Trust is set up to give UK citizens a chance to travel abroad and find out

information to improve their communities back home. One of the topics for 2008 was 'The Recruitment and Use of Volunteers' - just what I was doing at the time with the Action Desk.

So in April 2007 I put together a proposal to go to New Zealand. I went there whilst travelling after university and although their culture is similar to ours in many ways, it is a place where people are generally more inclined to volunteer.

I thought it would be an ideal place to compare and contrast the volunteering experience and I was lucky enough to be successful in my application, so started to planning my trip.

The basic plan is to travel around New Zealand for four weeks in October and November 2008. I'll be stopping off in various places to meet volunteers, visit different centres and projects and generally gather lots of information and, hopefully, inspiration!

I'll be writing an online diary while I'm away, which you can read by clicking on the link at the top right of this page.

last updated: 17/10/2008 at 11:41

APPENDIX III

My online diary which was updated on the BBC Devon website throughout my trip



Features

You are in: [Spotlight](#) > [Features](#) > V for Volunteering - Emily's online diary



Emily in the springtime snow!

V for Volunteering - Emily's online diary

Emily Wood, one of Spotlight's weather presenters, is off to New Zealand for four weeks on a volunteering project. Find out how she gets on in her online diary below.

Friday 14 November 2008 - The final countdown

As I sit and wait at Auckland Airport for my 30 hour journey home to begin, I thought I'd put together a few adventure statistics, to summarise what I've been doing for the past few weeks.

(Please note: due to my rubbish adding-up skills, the figures below are approximate):

Miles travelled (by the time I get home): 25, 681 (I think I might need to plant some more trees!!)

Planes travelled on: 6

Buses: 2

Automobiles: 7

People met (that I can remember the names of): 103

Kiwi fruits eaten: 5

Kiwi birds seen: 0

Hobbits found: 0 (although there was one person who was a maybe...)

Emails sent to organise this trip: 611

Glaciers touched: 1

Rocks which nearly fell on my head whilst touching glacier: 3

Nights spent in a convent: 3

Nights spent in a tent: 1

Nights in various spare rooms: 14

New Zealand wines sampled: A few :-)

Inspirational volunteer stories that I found: Lots!

So what happens when I get home? Well, I have to start deciphering my notes and figuring out what my notebook full of scribbles mean, to write a report for the Winston Churchill Trust on everything I have found. I'll also be passing on what will hopefully be useful information to volunteer centres back home.

I have also been recording some bits and pieces along the way, so if I can make something exciting out of it you might hear some of what I found on my trip on BBC Radio Devon or Cornwall sometime.

And I've been filming on a video camera too, so if my camera work is good enough (!) there might even be something on Spotlight... but I think I might need a day or two to recover before all the follow up work begins!



Emily at the Franz Josef glacier

Oh, and of course, I'll be back on the weather! I think my first early morning shift will be a bit of a shock - and as I'm currently enjoying 23C sunshine, the cold back home will be a bit of a shock too!

But the past four weeks have been an unbelievable experience for me. A big thank you to everyone who has helped along the way - the Devon Online folk for updating this diary (when I have found time to write an entry!), everyone else at BBC Plymouth who helped with advice and equipment before I left and the many people I have met along the way who have given up their time, knowledge and spare rooms for me.

I am hoping the information I've found will help the good people involved in volunteering. The one main thing I have found is that wherever you are in the world, there is nothing quite like doing something good for your community for free - and even though not everyone has much spare time, even just a little bit of help can make a big difference.

But if nothing else, I will certainly be out volunteering to plant more trees again soon, to help reduce the huge carbon footprint that I now have!

Wednesday 12 November 2008 - Road trips, and running out of time!

Apologies for the large gap between entries - I've been a bit out of touch for the past week, as I had a few days off to road trip through the mountains to get to the west coast of the South Island.

I found lots of snow and beaches and glaciers and sandflies, but not so much of the WiFi or mobile phone reception - although after the hectic time I'd had over the previous two and a half weeks it was quite nice to be out of touch for a few days!

Before setting off on the road trip, I had flown down to Christchurch from Wellington, to stay with a lady who had done a Winston Churchill Fellowship looking at volunteering 15 years ago - and wrote a book off the back of it!

She provided me with lots of great contacts and useful advice, as well as lots of home-grown veggies from her garden (it seems a be a very Kiwi thing to grow your own - probably because everything seems to grow so well here!)

From Christchurch I set off into the Southern Alps, hitting the road with a Kiwi friend of mine who I met last time I was here.

It was definitely the most adventurey bit of the adventure so far - our road trip included bathing in thermal pools whilst it was snowing, camping out in a field full of sandflies, climbing rock scree to touch a glacier and attempting to fish for salmon in the Tasman Sea (unsuccessfully).

A true New Zealand experience (although still haven't seen any Kiwi birds - or hobbits!)



Looking for yellow-eyed penguins

The final destination of the road trip was Dunedin, right at the bottom of the South Island (a city with a strong Scottish influence, if you hadn't already guessed from the name).

I'd met the volunteer centre manager Susie at the conference in Wellington, so she had already looked into setting up some visits for me, including meeting a conservation volunteer who helps to watch the yellow-eyed penguins, one of which we were lucky enough to see when we went out to meet him on the beach.

And in Dunedin they are lucky enough to have a youth volunteer coordinator, Lani, who is really cool and is so enthusiastic and creative when it comes to getting more young people involved.

For example, one of her current projects is setting up a radical cheerleading group - which will undoubtedly get more people hearing about volunteering, and is a great example of how volunteering can be fun!

However I only had two days in Dunedin before flying up to Auckland again today. A constant theme of this trip has been not having enough time - and I can't quite believe I fly home on Friday!

But still some work to do in Auckland before I leave, and will then have to start preparing myself for the 30 hours of travelling to get home!

Tuesday 28 October 2008 - Tauranga and 200 slices of toast

Day 9 of the great New Zealand volunteering expedition...

After leaving Auckland, I stopped off in Hamilton for a couple of nights where I stayed with a friend's mum. She's had some great experiences volunteering abroad, and cooked me some wonderful home-cooked food, which was very much appreciated!

I am now in Tauranga, in an area known as the Western Bay of Plenty, which is as picturesque as it sounds (and a great place for cloud spotting too - although it is mainly grey-looking stratus at the moment!)

I have just about recovered from the jetlag, after a fairly relaxed weekend of being shown the local sights by my hosts, the local volunteer centre manager Beverley and her husband.

It was also a public holiday here yesterday, so we had a look at some community volunteer projects, gardens and the like, but the real work started again today - with a 6am alarm call.



Emily doing the dishes!

By 7.30am we were at a local school to help out at their Breakfast Club. It's an initiative set up by the Red Cross in New Zealand for primary schools in the poorest areas, which is manned by volunteers.

If I ever have 47 children, I now know how much bread to buy for breakfast - lots!!

I think it was nine loaves and three large jars of strawberry jam we got through, not to mention the amount of milk, cereal, butter, Vegemite...

The highlights of the morning - the look on the little girl's face when I told her I didn't know what 'Milo' is (it's a chocolatey drink similar to Ovaltine - a staple of the school breakfast, which to the children's horror I had never heard of before!)

And a group of boys who thought I was French! I told them to guess again, and they did get it right second time round.

On to the next stop tomorrow, travelling down to Wellington for a two day volunteering conference. Most of the New Zealand volunteer centres will have a representative there, so it's great chance for me to gather lots of information.

And just to prove I am fully immersing myself in the New Zealand lifestyle - I had kiwi fruit for breakfast today!

Thursday 23 October 2008 - The day after the day after arrival

Hello from the other side of the world!

I have been meaning to write my first New Zealand diary entry since, well, ever since I got here, but it's not an exaggeration to say I haven't stopped since I landed, or when I have stopped I have been trying to catch up on sleep!

The journey was as enjoyable as you would expect it to be, when you spend the best part of 26 hours sitting in the same seat on the same plane.

But we landed on time and my bag got here too, so can't really complain, and we arrived into a beautiful sunny morning in Auckland.

An afternoon to have a nap, an evening to explore the city, and then the next day my first meeting at the volunteer centre in Auckland.



Emily and Cheryl

The volunteer centre manager, Cheryl, is a force of energy with huge levels of enthusiasm and dedication. She works with over 300 voluntary organisations across the greater Auckland area, so has to be really!

The following day she'd organised some visits to places and organisations which rely on volunteers, varying from social and community projects to conservation and animal welfare charities.

The highlight of the visits has to be being a guest of honour at a Diwali celebration organised by Shanti Niwas, a volunteer organisation which provides social activities and support to senior members of the Indian community in Auckland.

Seeing 78-year-olds doing Bollywood-style dancing - now that is something you don't get to see every day!

At the moment, I am mainly feeling overwhelmed by the amount of information I have already gathered - and I'm only three days in!

The task that lies ahead of me during the next four weeks still seems pretty huge, and am still feeling pretty exhausted from the jetlag.

However, I have a more laid-back weekend ahead of me, as it is a public holiday here on Monday, so hopefully I will have time to let my brain catch up with me. And the Kiwi 'no worries' attitude is helping me along the way too.

Oh, and you'll be pleased to hear that it is now raining, with a 'wet and windy' forecast for

the weekend!

Friday 17 October 2008 - The day before departure

All my bags are packed, I'm ready to go... Actually, my bags aren't packed, and I'm not ready to go at all, but I am leaving on a jet plane tomorrow, to start my Winston Churchill Travelling Fellowship to look at The Recruitment and Use of Volunteers in New Zealand.

The size of this project has almost overwhelmed me at times, but everyone I have spoken to so far has been so helpful, and I'm sure it will be the people that I meet along the way that will ensure it is a success.

Over the last few weeks, I have been visiting some volunteer organisations around Devon and Cornwall, speaking to the people that work there and some of their volunteers. This has given me a good insight into how the system currently works here, before I delve into meeting their Kiwi counterparts.

It has felt a bit odd sometimes, as I used to be much more involved with volunteering when I worked for the Community Service Volunteers group. My working life is now, obviously, all about the weather. But I still have a great interest in volunteering, and as I now work outside the sector my objective view may help me see things in a different light.

My first stop is Auckland where, despite only 24 hours of travel, I arrive three days after I leave England! A day to recover and sort out the jetlag, then I'll be meeting up with my first New Zealand volunteers, and the adventure will begin...

It's a real mix of excitement, anticipation and trepidation that I'm feeling at the moment. I am really looking forward to it, but it's been building up for so long now (I sent off the initial application a year and a half ago!) and travelling around a different country on your own is always going to be slightly nerve-wracking.

But I know I have some great people to meet up with on the other side of the world and it's such an amazing opportunity to spend time in a beautiful country, so I think overall, the excitement just about wins out.

Wish me luck!

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