

Margaret George Award paper

Volunteering: The Australian experience

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The National Archives of Australia is probably not a place that springs to mind when considering potential sources for researching volunteering and voluntary organisations. Indeed it may come as a surprise to know that for the last 20 years, the vast bulk of archives that I've used for my research on aspects of volunteering have come from the National Archives. When undertaking my PhD on civilian volunteering in World War II (later published in 2002 as *All Work, No Pay*), I spent weeks driving up and down the Hume Highway to the National Archives.¹ Now, with the help of the Margaret George Award, I have returned to work on my forthcoming book on volunteering post-1945.

Because there has been relatively little interest from Australian historians on twentieth-century volunteering, my work has always been involved in painting a broad canvas, looking at the issues Australia-wide, rather than focusing *per se* on the experiences of either individual organisations or people.²

One of the reasons why I have always gravitated towards the National Archives is the very limited material and records in the public domain on philanthropic and voluntary organisations. Even though the situation is much

¹ Melanie Oppenheimer, *All Work, No Pay: Australian Civilian Volunteers in War*, Ohio Productions, Walcha NSW, 2002; 'Volunteers in Action: Voluntary Work in Australia, 1939-1945', PhD, Macquarie University, 1997.

² See for example 'VAs: Australian voluntary aids during the Second World War', *Journal of the Australian War Memorial*, vol. 18, 1991, pp. 28-34; 'Control of wartime patriotic funds in Australia: The National Security (Patriotic Funds) Regulations, 1940-1953', *War and Society*, vol. 18, no. 1, 2000, pp. 71-90. Social welfare historians such as Brian Dickey, *No Charity There: A Short History of Social Welfare in Australia*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1987; and Steven Garton, *Out of Luck: Poor Australians and Social Welfare*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1990 have discussed the voluntary sector; and sociologist Cora Vellecoop-Baldock's, *Volunteers in Welfare*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1990, remains a seminal study on contemporary welfare volunteering.

better now than in the late 1980s when I started my academic career, voluntary organisations are often not very good at either understanding or recognising the importance of their own historical records. Lack of money often relegates the records to the 'safety' of the garage or under the bed of the secretary, or in one case I know the unused shower recess. In this particular instance, the octogenarian 'forgot' the records were there, and it wasn't until after her death that the files were eventually retrieved.

Although neglected historically, volunteering has been, and continues to be, a very important facet of our lives. Today over 34 per cent of Australians over the age of 18 volunteer, with the highest rates of volunteering occurring outside capital cities.³ Volunteers can be found in all walks of life – from coaching and the sporting field, to counselling and advocacy of refugees; from baking cakes for a school fete to planting trees and maintaining our wetlands. Volunteers are often the lifeblood of local communities. Volunteering is also very important in economic terms. It is estimated that volunteering contributes about \$42 billion a year to the Australian economy.⁴ Over 704.1 million hours of voluntary work is undertaken by Australians each year.⁵

This project, *Volunteering: The Australian experience*, which will be published by University of NSW Press, is examining how volunteering and voluntary organisations developed from 1945, and how voluntary action has shaped the economic, social, cultural and political frameworks of Australian history and society since the end of World War II, a high point in volunteering and voluntary action. 'Voluntary action' (a term coined by Sir William Beveridge, British bureaucrat, economist, Liberal politician and father of the welfare state) remains largely invisible in the history of Australia.⁶ To a great extent, historians have focussed on nineteenth-century philanthropy, and the emergence of state welfare in the twentieth century. Our pre-occupation with the 'state' – the role of government – in the twentieth century has been at the expense of the smaller but integral component – voluntary action.

A focus of this project, therefore, is to assess and explain the role played by the state with the voluntary sector. Governments have been integral to the voluntary sector, and the sector – and its volunteers – have been essential to governments. During the twentieth century in Australia a close relationship

³ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), *General Social Survey Summary Results Australia 2002*, ABS, Canberra, 2003.

⁴ Duncan Ironmonger, 'Measuring volunteering in economic terms' in J Warburton and M Oppenheimer (eds), *Volunteers and Volunteering*, Federation Press, Leichhardt, 2000.

⁵ ABS, *Voluntary Work, Australia, 2000*, ABS, Canberra, 2001. The ABS is to release new data on volunteering in December 2007.

⁶ W Beveridge, *Voluntary Action: A Report on Methods of Social Advance*, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1948. Beveridge was the author of the 1942 *Report on Social Insurance and Allied Services*, which became the basis of social welfare reforms and what became known as the British welfare state, although Beveridge apparently disliked the term 'welfare state' and never used it. For an analysis of Beveridge, the man, see Jose Harris, *William Beveridge: A Biography*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1997.

existed between the government and voluntary sector. This relationship or 'moving frontier' (the term used by the late British historian Geoffrey Finlayson) has shifted as the boundaries have changed over time.⁷ The voluntary, non-profit, charitable or third sector has always been a 'junior partner' with the state.⁸ Yet this relationship between the state and the voluntary sector is integral to the functioning of modern Western society and is part of our democratic tradition. We need to know more about it.

What I'm particularly interested in is what happened to all that volunteering spirit of the war years identified in my earlier work? What happened to the voluntary sector in postwar Australia? How did governments, who were very keen to harness voluntary organisations during the war (called patriotic funds), respond to the voluntary sector in the postwar years? My theory is that there are distinct periods of voluntary action in Australia in the second half of the twentieth century. The first concerns World War II and the immediate postwar period, with the 1970s providing the second major impetus.

I have examined the immediate postwar period and the role Lloyd Ross, a key figure in the labor movement and bureaucrat with the Department of Post-War Reconstruction, played in his largely unsuccessful attempts to harness wartime volunteering in the postwar period.⁹ Ross believed that government had a key role in assisting this voluntary activity. As he said, 'A government can build a community centre, but only the people in the community can make it work and live'.¹⁰ The ABC worked closely with the Department and played a part in encouraging community activity through publications, broadcasts and listening groups. This type of 'community action' was heralded in the ABC booklet, *The Community Can Do It: Make a Plan*, published in 1945 to accompany a broadcast series produced by the ABC in May–July 1945 about community activities.¹¹

⁷ Geoffrey Finlayson, *Citizen, State and Social Welfare in Britain, 1830–1990*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1994. See also AFC Bourdillon, *Voluntary Social Services: Their Place in the Modern State*, Methuen, London, 1945; C Braithwaite, *The Voluntary Citizen: An Enquiry into the Place of Philanthropy in the Community*, Methuen, London, 1938; M Brasnett, *Voluntary Social Action London*, NCSS, 1969; M Roof, *Voluntary Societies and Social Policy*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1957.

⁸ D Owen, *English Philanthropy, 1660–1960*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1964; J Davis Smith et al. (eds), *An Introduction to the Voluntary Sector*, Routledge, London, 1995; F Prochaska, *The Voluntary Impulse: Philanthropy in Modern Britain*, Faber and Faber, London, 1988.

⁹ See Melanie Oppenheimer, 'Voluntary action and welfare in post-1945 Australia: Preliminary perspectives', *History Australia*, vol. 2, no. 3, 2005, pp. 82.1–82.15.

¹⁰ Speech given by Lloyd Ross, Thursday 27 April (undated) c. 1945. Papers of Lloyd Ross, National Library of Australia, MS 3939/10/5.

¹¹ This pamphlet was written by the Department of Post-War Reconstruction and Lloyd Ross' group, and only sub-edited and published by the ABC, yet this was not acknowledged. See minute from Lloyd Ross to Dr Coombs, 12 June 1945, in NAA: A9816, 1943/765 Part 2.

Whilst some of Australia's most well-established voluntary organisations have histories that pre-date World War II, such as the Australian Red Cross, Rotary, Apex and Surf Lifesaving, many others have their origins in the war or the postwar period. For example, the National Trust (1945 NSW), Meals on Wheels (1952 Vic; 1953 SA; 1957 NSW), Marriage Guidance Counselling (1953), Little Athletics (1964) and the Australian Conservation Foundation (1966). The rise of the environmental and heritage movement and the development of emergency services all occurred after 1945. Many of these organisations have had an ongoing relationship with the Commonwealth government and as a result, there are sometimes significant caches of records held by the National Archives.

So what kinds of National Archives files have I been looking at to find evidence of volunteering and voluntary action? Well, just as the voluntary sector has been described as a 'loose and baggy monster',¹² so too has my selection of files been broad and eclectic. For example, I examined the A463 series of correspondence files of the Prime Minister's Department in the 1960s and 1970s regarding Commonwealth assistance to overseas voluntary aid organisations, as well as specific organisations such as the Australian Vietnamese Association of Victoria formed in 1966.¹³ The A445 correspondence files of the Department of Immigration for the Good Neighbour Council are also extensive.¹⁴

Files from the A4940 series of the Menzies and Holt ministries concerning increased maintenance payments for child migrants were particularly interesting.¹⁵ In 1954, Harold Holt, as Minister for Immigration, was concerned about the welfare of child migrants and was looking to increase federal payments to the voluntary organisations (church-based groups, Dr Barnados and Fairbridge) who were undertaking a program of child migration on behalf of the Commonwealth government. Funding for the scheme was split between state, federal and the United Kingdom governments. Although child welfare and aftercare of migrants were primarily a state responsibility, Holt argued that due to the increased cost of living, the Commonwealth, in accepting special responsibilities for British child migrants, should increase the federal child endowment payment of 10 shillings. Essentially Holt argued that the Commonwealth should not 'evade the moral responsibility it assumes, when it brings the children here, of ensuring adequate provision is made'. However, Holt could not convince his cabinet colleagues, especially the Treasurer, William McMahon. The care of

¹² Jeremy Kendall and Martin Knapp, 'A loose and baggy monster: Boundaries, definitions and typologies', in Justin Davis Smith et al. (eds), *An Introduction to the Voluntary Sector*, Routledge, London and New York, 1995, pp. 66-95.

¹³ See, for example, NAA: A463, 1973/1421 and A1838, 2101/3/17 Part 1.

¹⁴ For example, NAA: A445, 112/3/5.

¹⁵ Increased maintenance payments in respect of child migrants sponsored by approved voluntary organisations. NAA: A4940, C1092.

children was a state responsibility, McMahon responded. 'They [the states] are not short of funds and the payments would discriminate against Australian born children because a bigger child endowment would be paid to migrant children ... it is good policy to let sleeping dogs lie or to put it somewhat differently it is a bad policy to keep prodding the bees'.¹⁶ I'll come back to this notion of 'prodding the bees' (which I interpret as Commonwealth government funding for voluntary organisations) later in the paper.

What I want to do now is to focus in a little more depth on a couple of areas, so let's start with sport – always a popular topic with Australians. Today according to the ABS, 'sport and recreation' has the second highest category of volunteers in Australia with 21 per cent of all volunteer hours devoted to the sport and recreation category. Perhaps not surprisingly, there is a definite gender divide in this area. For example, with coaching and refereeing sport volunteers, it is 29 per cent men compared with 16 per cent women.¹⁷

There has been a close relationship between sport and volunteering in Australian history, no more so than with the Olympic Games and there is a good collection of files in the National Archives. Australian sport was built on the concept of amateurism and volunteering was a cornerstone of the Olympic Games movement.¹⁸ The Games were undertaken within the 'spirit of amateurism'. The word 'amateur' comes from the French 'amour', and Italian 'amatore', to love. It means 'a person who engages in a pursuit, especially a sport, on an unpaid basis'.¹⁹ Volunteers, on the other hand, are people who undertake unpaid work 'without payment or coercion'.²⁰ Over time, however, the concept of amateurism in sport has almost completely disappeared, recasting not only sport but volunteering as well.

Back in 1956 and the Melbourne Olympic Games, the concept of amateurism in sport was under threat. As the President of the International Olympic Committee, American, Avery Brundage, said:

In this materialistic age in which we live, there is in some places more or less continuous pressure to lower amateur standards. Every organisation connected with amateur sport and the Olympic Games must not only firmly enforce the amateur code, but also

¹⁶ Cabinet minute, Vice-President's Committee, 11 November 1954 and Cabinet minute, 24 November 1954. NAA: A4940, C1092.

¹⁷ ABS, *Voluntary Work*, pp. 5–6.

¹⁸ For a more detailed explanation of this topic, see Melanie Oppenheimer, 'For the love of it: Volunteering and the Games', *Teaching History*, vol. 41, no. 1, 2007.

¹⁹ *Oxford Dictionary of English*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2003.

²⁰ Melanie Oppenheimer, 'An overview of the voluntary principle in Australia' in Jeni Warburton and Melanie Oppenheimer (eds), *Volunteers and Volunteering*, Federation Press, Leichhardt, 2000, p. 10.

should initiate and actively promote a program of education on the advantages of amateurism.²¹

During the 1956 Melbourne Olympics, Australian athletes were amateurs, not professionals. Their coaches and the officials from the various sporting associations were also unpaid. They were acting in an 'honorary' capacity. All Australian sporting associations involved in the Games (with their officials) were supported by their voluntary sporting organisations who were, in turn, funded by the government for food, accommodation, travel and their uniforms.²²

There were some 'volunteers' as we know them today, 'expert' Lady Volunteer Car Drivers, for example, who drove the athletes and Olympic officials to the various venues around Melbourne.²³ The local car industry provided male volunteers for a variety of tasks such as garage attendants for daily washing and servicing of buses and cars. But the major source of volunteer labour for the Melbourne Olympics was the Australian Army. More than 600 soldiers were seconded to the Olympics to cover a range of activities such as stewards and scoreboard operators, signallers, traffic controllers, administrative and security jobs at the Olympic village. Officers and men fired salutes and hoisted and lowered the flags, acted as marshals for the opening parade; and the RAN and RAAF brass bands learnt the national anthems of all the countries. The Army also supplied 22 000 sheets, 11 000 blankets and pillowslips; 6 000 pillows and 6 000 beds for the athletes in the Heidelberg Olympic Village.²⁴

The 1956 Melbourne Olympic Games was a huge success in Australia, especially in terms of the development of Australian sport at a local grassroots level. But it was also the end of an era. The 1956 Olympic Games was the last of the 'amateur' games. From then on, the costs of hosting the Games escalated enormously due to the competitiveness of host cities to outdo each other, a growth in the number of sports, the influence of TV, as well as increasing security issues.

Australia's strong amateur sporting tradition has largely disappeared at a national and international level. Professionalism is now the norm in most sports. The move from amateurism to professionalism in sport, particularly with large events such as the Olympics Games, has shifted the unpaid labour from the athletes, their managers, officials and games organisers who are now paid (sometimes handsomely), to volunteers. The same values and morals

²¹ Australian Olympic Federation Bulletin, 1/1954. NAA: AA1967/379, 6.

²² Minutes of 45th meeting of Finance and General Purposes Committee, Friday 15 June 1956. NAA: AA1967/379, 2 part 2.

²³ XVI Olympiad Official News Service, No. 9, December 1955, published by the Organising Committee for the XVI Olympiad, Melbourne, p. 3. NAA: AA1967/379, 6.

²⁴ Unreferenced newspaper clipping, undated (c. 1956), Guyot collection, in possession of author.

that once were the basis of amateur sport have been transferred onto the thousands of volunteers required to be recruited, trained and organised so that events such as the Olympic Games can be held.

Another area well represented in the National Archives collection is community/welfare, and today in Australia this category is where the largest numbers of volunteers are found. Twenty-six per cent of volunteer hours are spent in community/welfare related areas, and women also dominate in this field.²⁵ In the post-1945 period, voluntary action and voluntary organisations were integral to the delivery of social welfare in Australia. Despite the important shift towards increased statutory action, with the advent of the 'welfare state', the social welfare voluntary sector continued to thrive. The period also saw the 'arrival' of the professional social worker, and ongoing debates between paid (professional) versus unpaid (volunteer) worker.²⁶

For this project I have consulted a number of National Archives records that cover this broad field of community/welfare, such as the Attorney-General's files concerning marriage guidance counselling. Here was one of the first examples in Australia of a partnership between the Commonwealth government and the voluntary sector.²⁷ Marriage guidance counselling services undertaken by the voluntary sector was written into legislation with the *Matrimonial Causes Act 1959*.²⁸ Yet as is typical of the relationship, the voluntary sector had identified a problem in this area years before, and the Act merely formalised, through statute, what voluntary organisations were doing for decades previously.²⁹ One of the traditional strengths of the voluntary sector is that it can identify a need in the community and address that need, pioneering new services as social needs changed. For example, in terms of marriage guidance, organisations like the Family Welfare Bureau in NSW was identifying and attending to these types of social problems both during, and after, World War II.³⁰ The peak body, the National Marriage Guidance Council of Australia was formed in 1953, representing the State

²⁵ ABS, *Voluntary Work*, pp. 5–6. As mentioned earlier these figures were published in 2000. The next ABS data is expected in December 2007.

²⁶ It was the voluntary sector itself that was at the forefront of professionalising social work, and professional social workers were first employed by the voluntary sector in World War II. See Melanie Oppenheimer, *All Work, No Pay* and RJ Lawrence, *Professional Social Work in Australia*, ANU, Canberra, 1965.

²⁷ See the correspondence files of the Attorney-General's Department (A432) concerning the establishment and co-ordination of the Marriage Guidance Counselling organisations across Australia in the 1960s. One of the other very early recipients of Commonwealth funding were the Lady Gowrie Child Care Centres, established in 1938 as preschool educational centres.

²⁸ See Melanie Oppenheimer, *History Australia*.

²⁹ Australian voluntary organisations were following on from the British example begun in the 1930s. By 1947 there were over 100 Marriage Guidance Councils in England and Wales. See speech by Catherine King, 'Women's Magazine'. NAA: SP369/1, K/5.

³⁰ The files of the Family Welfare Bureau are held in the Mitchell Library, Sydney. ML MSS 2723.

Marriage Guidance Councils in all states. But once the Commonwealth took an interest in the area, and legislated accordingly, the relationship between government and voluntary sector shifted.³¹ The *Matrimonial Causes Act 1959* gave the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department the authority to select and approve marriage guidance organisations. These voluntary organisations then received a Commonwealth subsidy to carry out the service.

This 'interesting experiment in social action', as Les Harvey – the first marriage guidance officer within the Attorney-General's Department – called it, was a new and radical innovation for the Commonwealth government in the 1960s.³² By 1966, there were 20 approved marriage guidance organisations across Australia with 36 counselling centres. Seven were non-denominational marriage guidance councils; a number were specifically religion-based; and others such as the Catholic Family Welfare Bureau were represented in Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and Hobart. The voluntary organisations received both federal and state government subsidies.³³

Another example of the slow and subtle shift of the relationship between the Commonwealth and voluntary organisations concerns that iconic voluntary organisation, Meals on Wheels. It is an example of a social welfare organisation with its roots in Britain. The Australian version was modelled on a World War II Women's Voluntary Service (WVS) idea, and brought to Australia in 1949 by Mrs Nancy Dobson, the honorary secretary of the Ladies Auxiliary from the South Melbourne Council.³⁴ In 1953, Doris Taylor founded Meals on Wheels Inc in South Australia, and in 1957 the Sydney City Council set up in NSW.

Following on from an election pledge of then Prime Minister John Gorton, the Delivered Meals Subsidy Bill 1970 provided voluntary organisations with a \$1 subsidy for every ten meals served.³⁵ The issue of a Commonwealth subsidy to Meals on Wheels had been simmering for some time, and was part of the overall response by the Commonwealth to the states in building a new state-federal funding agreement in regards to Home Care Program for the Aged and Capital Assistance for Nursing Home Beds in State Nursing Homes. This initiative emerged from the 1967 and 1968 Australian Health Minister's

³¹ It was the subject of a paper presented at the 1966 Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) conference. See LV Harvey, 'The Federal Government and voluntary agencies working together in marriage guidance', in RJ Lawrence, *Community Service: Citizens and Social Welfare Organizations*, FW Cheshire, Melbourne, 1966, pp. 81-98.

³² LV Harvey, *Community Service*, p. 81.

³³ LV Harvey, *Community Service*, p. 86.

³⁴ See Delivered Meals Subsidy Bill 1970, second reading, Australia, House of Representatives, 4 March 1970, p. 62. There does seem to be some confusion about the specific dates of the founding of Meals on Wheels in the various states.

³⁵ See Delivered Meals Subsidy Bill 1970, pp. 61-68. See also NAA: A446, 1970/95232 and NAA: A5882, CO786.

Conference in regards to financial assistance for domiciliary services, which included home nursing, a housekeeping service, home help and other specialist services.³⁶ The package was largely aimed at relieving the demand for aged care accommodation in public hospitals and nursing homes, and encouraged the elderly to stay in their own homes.

The development of Meals on Wheels was ad hoc and varied from state to state, with some state governments assisting with funding, but others not. The scheme was most developed in South Australia through the voluntary organisation Meals on Wheels Inc where, with generous state government assistance, volunteers delivered 1300 meals daily to the aged. In Victoria, the state Department of Health subsidised the activity through local municipal government and Senior Citizens' Clubs, while in Western Australia, the League of Home Help for Sick and Aged Inc and a couple of councils provided the service with subsidies. In Tasmania, hospital kitchens provided the meals with delivery organised by two voluntary organisations. In NSW and Queensland, there was no state subsidy at all (although in NSW hospital kitchens were sometimes available), but it was largely left up to local government, service clubs and other community groups.³⁷ In terms of service to country areas, the concept was most well developed in Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania and NSW.³⁸

The Commonwealth subsidy was, therefore, one way of trying to create a more equitable system across the nation, to encourage the expansion of voluntary organisations already delivering meals on wheels to elderly residents, as well as encouraging new endeavours in states not well represented, such as Queensland. Meals on Wheels is a good example of this common theme in Australia – the variations between states in specific community endeavours with federal funding attempting to provide more uniform services across state borders.

If the first distinct period of voluntary action was during and just after World War II, and the 1950s and 1960s were a time of readjustment and subtle shifts in the relationship between the state and voluntary action as evidenced by marriage guidance counselling and Meals on Wheels, then the 1970s were revolutionary. Whatever your views are of the Whitlam government, the effects on the voluntary sector were profound. Like a lightning rod, the policies of the Whitlam federal government fundamentally changed the shape

³⁶ See Cabinet Welfare Committee, *Domiciliary Services: Preliminary Report of Director-General of Social Services*, NAA: A5882, C0786 and 'Direct Commonwealth Subsidies to Organisations Providing Meals on Wheels', 30 June 1969, NAA: A5619, C647. The Home Nursing Subsidy Scheme was introduced by the Commonwealth in 1957 to promote the expansion and development of aged care homes and to take pressure off hospitals.

³⁷ Cabinet Welfare Committee, *Domiciliary Services: Preliminary Report of Director-General of Social Services and Appendix A*. NAA: A5882, C0786.

³⁸ In Victoria it was 400 meals a day; SA, 200 meals a day; Tasmania, 87 meals a day, and in NSW the scheme operated in 55 towns although no meal figure was available. Appendix B. NAA: A5882, C0786.

and configuration of voluntary action in Australia. This is the second major shift in the post-1945 period.

What I am referring to here specifically (but not exclusively) is the Australian Assistance Plan (AAP), a little remembered, yet radical and imaginative idea of social welfare reform introduced by the Whitlam government in 1973.³⁹ Despite its short life (the program was abolished in 1976) and its shortcomings (which were considerable), the AAP, along with other initiatives from the Department of Urban and Regional Development (DURD), helped to reinvigorate the voluntary sector and fundamentally recast the ways in which Commonwealth governments and voluntary organisations interacted with each other.

The AAP was one of the major policy initiatives made by Whitlam during the 1972 election campaign. It was a radical concept in which the Commonwealth government directly funded local community endeavours through a system of regional development councils. Rather than fund welfare through grants to the states, the Commonwealth government became more closely involved at a local community level – the scale of which was unheard of at the time.

What is particularly relevant in terms of voluntary action, is that the AAP was the first attempt by a Commonwealth government to not only include voluntary organisations in its policy but to acknowledge their importance in the delivery of a wide range of social welfare services across communities. Voluntary organisations would not be taken for granted. As Bill Hayden, Minister for Social Security, said in March 1973, ‘the Assistance Plan will ... seek to rationalise and co-ordinate voluntary social welfare efforts at a community level, and will aim to give greater recognition to the volunteer principle as a means of securing grass roots involvement...’.⁴⁰ The AAP would complete already existing programs such as income support and welfare-related social policies of health, education, housing, employment and migration.

The AAP was to be funded by the Department of Social Security and overseen by the Social Welfare Commission, established by an Act of Parliament (the *Social Welfare Commission Act 1973*). Headed up by Marie Coleman (formerly of the Victorian Council of Social Service and the first woman to head a statutory authority), the Social Welfare Commission was to ‘make

³⁹ The AAP rates poorly in general Australian history textbooks. Geoffrey Bolton’s *The Middle Way (The Oxford History of Australia. Volume 5, 1942–1988: The Middle Way*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1990) barely mentions it. Stuart Macintyre’s *A Concise History of Australia*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1999 omits it completely, as does the *Oxford Companion to Australian History*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1999. Articles written by social work academics in the mid to late 1970s are generally damning, for example, Leonard Tierney with Helen McMahon, *From Vague Ideas to Unfeasible Roles*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1979.

⁴⁰ NAA: A463, 1973/1522.

recommendations to the Government on the development of social welfare in Australia'.⁴¹

As already discussed, in the early 1970s the Commonwealth government had small but important subsidy arrangements with a number of specific welfare services through legislation, such as Meals on Wheels.⁴² The role of the AAP would be to complement these existing arrangements, by encouraging local action to develop services and to facilitate the co-ordination of welfare activities of local groups such as church bodies, service clubs and self-help organisations in order to promote an effective overall system of social welfare for the community.

The concept of the AAP was influenced by a number of overseas initiatives such as the American community movement and Community Action Program of the 1960s, the British Community Development Project (1971), and the Canadian Assistance Plan (created in 1966 and involving cost sharing provisions between provincial and federal governments).⁴³ During its brief existence, Marie Coleman and university academics were sent overseas to report on what other comparable countries were doing. The US had recently implemented the 'War on Poverty' where over 3000 multi-service neighbourhood centres received federal funding through the US Services Integration Projects scheme. Between July and August 1974, Marie Coleman visited a number of countries including Tanzania, Kenya, Denmark, the UK and Canada to study systems of social administration and the delivery of welfare within a federal structure.⁴⁴

However, a key model for the proposed structure and implementation of the AAP, especially the structure of the Regional Councils for Social Development (RCSD) that were to include all levels of government, voluntary organisations and local citizens coming together to decide what projects were needed in their specific region, was found closer to home. In Geelong, Victoria, an innovative social planning model had been established for a two-year trial in the early 1970s, where the Geelong Community Chest⁴⁵ and Victorian Council

⁴¹ Minister for Social Security Bill Hayden, Social Welfare Commission Bill 1973. Australia, House of Representatives 1973, vol. 85, p. 1237.

⁴² These included the Aged Persons' Homes Act; Delivered Meals Subsidy Act; State Grants (Home Care) Act; States Grants (Paramedical Services) Act; Handicapped Children (Assistance) Act; Sheltered Employment (Assistance) Act; and the most recent one, the Child Care Act.

⁴³ Tierney argued that part of the problems of the AAP may have come from a lack of context for some of these programs not working in other countries. Leonard Tierney, *From Vague Ideas to Unfeasible Roles*, pp. 54-55.

⁴⁴ *Citizen Participation in Community Planning*, report by Marie Coleman, 1974 (document 363). NAA: A3390, volume 12.

⁴⁵ The Geelong Community Chest was established in 1954 to control the number of appeals and prevent duplication of fundraising in the Geelong area. It was supported by all sections of the community including 'professional groups, trade unions, business and industrial leaders and the man in the street'. It raised funds and distributed them within the local

of Social Service developed 'co-operative social planning' with all three levels of government and the local community.⁴⁶ And in South Australia under the dynamic Labor government led by Don Dunstan, Community Councils for Social Development were established through the *Community Welfare Act 1972*.

The initial idea was to fund a limited number (six) of pilot projects to test out the ideas of the AAP, that is to establish six Regional Councils for Social Development. For the pilot programs, the Commonwealth government gave three basic types of grants – administration grants of \$20 000 per annum for three years, capitation grants to undertake community welfare activities of \$2 per head of population per annum; and funds of up to \$12 000 per annum to employ Community Development Officers to help in the planning process.⁴⁷ Another grant of \$2000 could be allocated to designated groups to form a regional council.

But as Tom O'Brien (an academic and consultant to the Social Welfare Commission) stated at the time, although the AAP was an experimental project and originally proposed as a research exercise, volunteers and ordinary people in local communities not only 'found the AAP organisational ideas both interesting and challenging', but 'the chance of acquiring money for locally controlled development was too good to miss'.⁴⁸ There were ructions about favouritism and questions as to why certain regions were getting pilot funding and not others. So by November 1973, the pilot program had ballooned from six to 35 regional areas around Australia covering inner and outer metropolitan areas, city and country, working and middle class, in order to 'enable the widest possible information to be analysed and evaluated'.⁴⁹ The AAP was always called an 'experiment' but as was common with so much from the Whitlam era, there was a sense of urgency and programs were rushed into being before they were ready.

By the end of 1973, Bill Hayden, as Minister for Social Security, had announced the grants under the AAP. The types of programs that could receive funding included family and childcare, adolescent services, aged pension care and community health and welfare centres. But essentially it was

community. See Proposal for the Formation of a Regional Council for Social Development, May 1973. NAA: A3390, volume 1.

⁴⁶ Marie Coleman, Community Welfare Development, press statement, 24 May 1973. NAA: A463, 1973/1522.

⁴⁷ 'What is the Australian Assistance Plan?', p. 24. NAA: A3390, 414.

⁴⁸ Tom O'Brien, *Planning–Becoming–Development: A Study of Public Participation in Localized Social Planning Leading Towards Community Development. An Australian Assistance Plan Experience*, Australian National University, Canberra, 1977, p. 6.

⁴⁹ Minister for Social Security, Mr Bill Hayden, press statement, 19 October 1973. NAA: A463, 1973/1522.

up to each Regional Council to decide on a program as the needs of each region were different.⁵⁰

The AAP made the documentary called *A Say in Your Community with the Australian Assistance Plan*, which was filmed about the Hunter Region AAP scheme in NSW.⁵¹ A newsletter, *Grassroots* was also published to disseminate information to communities across Australia.

The types of projects that received funding from the AAP were broad, reflecting the diversity of community needs across Australia. Much of the funding went on providing infrastructure and equipment for local organisations. For example, for the Nunawading North Neighbourhood Project in Melbourne, AAP funding was awarded to establish a neighbourhood centre to provide a community workshop, community kitchen, food co-operative and migrant conversation group. In Wagga, the Community Action Group received funding for their operating costs. The voluntary organisation ran an emergency housekeeping service, information centre and trained volunteers. The Victorian St. Albans East Latchkey Kids Project's funding went towards equipment, administration and cleaning costs for an after school program, and the Marrickville Women's Refuge Collective received funding to establish and maintain a women's hostel for homeless women and children.⁵² The flow of Commonwealth funding through the AAP stimulated the voluntary sector and volunteers across Australia. This was noted in 1974:

In relation to the stated goal of getting people interested and involved in their local communities, it must be said that the AAP has had a significant impact in NSW. Compared to one year ago, many more people are talking about local community development despite the fact they may not recognise the AAP as being responsible for their involvement.⁵³

There were, however, significant problems for the fledgling AAP. It was caught up in a split in the social work community, which as a relatively new profession felt threatened by the AAP's recognition and use of the voluntary sector and volunteers.⁵⁴ There was also considerable debate concerning the AAP's ideas about participation.⁵⁵ It was the Australian government's

⁵⁰ Minister for Social Security, Mr Bill Hayden, Australian Assistance Plan for NSW, press statement, 10 December 1973. NAA: A463, 1973/1522.

⁵¹ NAA: C809, 081124.

⁵² 'What is the Australian Assistance Plan?'. NAA: A3390, 414.

⁵³ Interim Progress Report, NSW Evaluation Team, prepared for Evaluators Meeting, Melbourne, September 1974 (document 369). NAA: A3390, volume 13.

⁵⁴ Social work as a university degree was introduced in Australia during World War II.

⁵⁵ Carol Pateman's theories on participation and democracy published in 1970 were quoted extensively during the AAP era. See Carol Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory*, Cambridge University Press, London, 1970.

philosophy that programs supported financially by the government should allow adequate opportunity for all people to develop their full potential, that welfare services should be 'community initiated'. 'Participation is about citizenship and citizenship as a social process', stated Rolf Dahrendorf who also believed that participation was a means of getting every individual to exercise their own social rights and obligations in society.⁵⁶ (This sounds very similar to the late 1990s mantra of mutual obligation.) But there were others who believed that this was a false dawn – that there was little to indicate a move towards a genuine citizen participation movement in Australia.⁵⁷

Secondly, there were problems between the AAP and some established social welfare agencies and the Councils of Social Service who viewed the arrival of the AAP and its Regional Councils of Social Development with either grudging acceptance or positive alarm. Thirdly, the attitude of state governments and their bureaucrats varied from agreement that the basic principles of the AAP were sound, to suspicion that the AAP was simply a grab for power by the federal government, by way of strengthening regional involvement at the expense of the states. At the end of 1974, the Victorian government challenged the validity of the AAP in the High Court. Joined by New South Wales and Western Australia, they argued that the federal government had exceeded its powers (through section 51 of the Constitution) through the establishment of the AAP. The case was dismissed by a four to three majority. South Australia had already set up a similar scheme through the Community Welfare Act and Community Councils, and it was important that the AAP worked closely together with that state to ensure the programs complemented each other.⁵⁸

Fourthly, there was a lack of communication between the Social Welfare Commission (who administered the AAP) and other departments. Marie Coleman, as the first paid female head of a Federal government statutory authority, felt very strongly about being left out of the loop.⁵⁹ This was especially the case with departments such as the newly formed Department of Urban and Regional Development (under Minister Tom Uren), which embarked on an equally ambitious regional and local community regeneration program. The same applied to the Immigration portfolio, led by

⁵⁶ Quoted in 'What is the Australian Assistance Plan?', p. 23.

⁵⁷ See, for example, Leonard Tierney, *From Vague Ideas to Unfeasible Roles* and Adam Graycar, *Perspectives in Australian Social Policy*, Macmillan, South Melbourne, 1978.

⁵⁸ See letter from South Australian Premier, Don Dunstan to Prime Minister Gough Whitlam, 2 January 1974 and Appendix I, South Australian Department for Community Welfare – Summary of Programmes and Planning of Relevance to the Australian Assistance Plan. NAA: A463 1973/1582. See also Adam Graycar, 'The relevance of community involvement to social welfare and public administration', in *Perspectives in Australian Social Policy*, pp. 350–62.

⁵⁹ This can be evidenced throughout the files of the Social Welfare Commission. See especially NAA: A3390, volumes 1–18.

the flamboyant Al Grassby, who had significant and emerging ethnic self-help groups whom the department funded rather than the AAP.⁶⁰

The final humiliation came as the Whitlam government unravelled in 1975. As part of new government administrative arrangements, budget cuts and other ministerial dramas, Bill Hayden moved to the Treasury portfolio and Senator John Wheeldon from Western Australia became the new Minister for Social Security. Whitlam then announced the abolition the Social Welfare Commission on 5 June 1975, without first informing the SWC Commissioners.⁶¹ Following on from the dismissal of the Whitlam government and subsequent elections in late 1975, the newly-elected Fraser government and Social Security Minister, Senator Margaret Guilfoyle, announced that the AAP would be shelved with funding to continue for 12 months from July 1976. After that it was up to the state governments to administer and fund the programs, as the AAP was not an appropriate program for the Commonwealth to be involved in.⁶²

The Liberal government of Malcolm Fraser (1975–83) saw a return 'to the quiet conservative social policy mould'.⁶³ To be sure, he put the lid on the unheralded spending of the Whitlam years, through abolishing schemes such as the AAP and the Department of Urban and Regional Development. Fraser established a Task Force on Welfare and Health, known as the Bailey Report, to find out what were and were not Commonwealth government responsibilities. But one of the aspects of the Whitlam revolution that Fraser ultimately could not contain was the rise of the voluntary sector. Fraser may have wanted to halt the 'moving frontier' but the genie had been let out of the bottle.

An important aspect of what the AAP did, or attempted to do, was to formally recognise the role that voluntary organisations played within local communities in delivering broad social welfare. In policy terms, this was revolutionary. Previous Liberal governments approved of and used voluntary organisations in a range of fields but the general view was that apart from a few key areas such as marriage guidance counselling and meals on wheels, it was not the Commonwealth government's responsibility to fund or support voluntary organisations, hence Billy McMahon's comments about prodding

⁶⁰ Prior to March 1975, the Settlement Service Branch of the Department of Labour and Immigration dealt with most of the social services and initiatives concerning migrants. This was only handed over to the Department of Social Security in March 1975 and then called the Migrant Community Services Branch. See Department of Social Security Migrant Community Service Branch (document 399), NAA: A3390, volume 16.

⁶¹ Letter from all SWC Commissioners to Prime Minister, 27 June 1975. NAA: A3390, volume 18.

⁶² On 2 February 1976 Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser announced that he was abolishing the SWC. The SWC (Repeal) Bill 1976 received a second reading on 25 August 1976 in the House of Representatives.

⁶³ Adam Graycar, 'Introduction', in *Perspectives in Australian Social Policy*, p. 9.

the bees, mentioned earlier in the paper. But by 1972, when Whitlam came to power, the Commonwealth government's financial involvement had slowly been increasing anyway through capitation grants to the states especially in the area of aged care. The frontier had been moving and the bees were buzzing albeit quietly.

In identifying the voluntary sector as particularly important in the delivery of social welfare across Australia, the Social Welfare Commission (SWC) discovered that there was precious little known about the sector. The Commonwealth government was allocating an increasingly substantial amount of funding to a sector they knew precious little about. The welfare services expenditure by the Commonwealth government to the non-government sector increased from \$44.6 million in 1973-74 to \$131 million in 1975-76.⁶⁴ In 1975, the SWC sought to remedy this situation by commissioning research on voluntary organisations involved in welfare by advertising for proposals for research into the role of voluntary agencies across Australia.⁶⁵ This was the first attempt of its kind for a Commonwealth government to commission this type of research on the voluntary sector.

Finally, there is little doubt that the Whitlam government opened up a Pandora's box when the AAP was initiated, and set all those bees buzzing in the voluntary sector. The files of the SWC and AAP clearly reveal that this new channel of federal funding stimulated local communities by supporting existing organisations, and in some cases helping to establish others. A range of self-help organisations in areas such as childcare, after school care programs, disability services, migrant needs, women's refuges and community health centres benefited directly.⁶⁶

Conclusion

There is little doubt that World War II had a defining role in the development of voluntary action across Australian society. When examining marriage guidance counselling, Meals on Wheels and the like in the post-1945 period, this 'new sense of civic responsibility' developed during the war, encouraged voluntarism afterwards. Although there was modest Commonwealth government involvement with the voluntary sector through the 1950s and 1960s, the frontier expanded (or relationship between the state and voluntary sector took a leap) in the 1970s. Through programs such as the AAP, there

⁶⁴ 'What is the Australian Assistance Plan?', p. 6.

⁶⁵ Document 404. NAA: A3390, volume 16.

⁶⁶ Women's refuges are a particularly interesting case. The first women's refuge in Australia, Elsie Women's Refuge in Glebe, was founded in 1973. By 1980 there were about 100 across Australia. The Whitlam government funded a number of refuges (some through the AAP, like the Marrickville example) but after it lost office, Prime Minister Fraser (1976-83) handed back responsibility to the states and the refuges struggled until 1983 when the newly-elected Hawke government restored funding to them. See Rose Melville, 'The slippery slide of women's refuge funding, 1970s to 1990s: NSW experience', *Women Against Violence*, issue 5, 1998, pp. 15-33.

was a significant shift with more government interaction and support. As over 30 per cent of voluntary organisations today have their origins in the 1970s, there has to be a connection.⁶⁷

Secondly, the influence of British, American and Canadian ideas in the development of voluntary action is clearly evident in the Australian context. During the early stages of World War II, the Menzies government attempted to introduce Canadian-style federal legislation to control the patriotic funds.⁶⁸ Later governments looked overseas regularly for inspiration and new policy directions. But in addition to these overseas influences, our own peculiar brand of federalism has both assisted and hindered the structure and development of Australian voluntarism. There is a particular type of Australian voluntary action, a 'hybrid' Australian version, an 'Australian way' of voluntary action. As Jill Roe wrote in 1998, 'The Australian Way is a dynamic historical concept ... that is, it expresses something which has grown out of the Australian experience' of influential colonial and state governments and an increasingly dominant federal government.⁶⁹

There is certainly a connection between our sense of identity and who we are as a people, that includes mateship, helping each other out and volunteering our time and labour for a variety of causes. Volunteering and voluntary action, through both self-help and philanthropy, have always had and continue to have, a very special part to play in our Australian way of life. We have home grown examples, such as Surf Lifesaving and Landcare, as well as imported models such as the Australian Red Cross and Meals on Wheels.

Volunteering also changed significantly since 1945. As demonstrated in this paper, especially with the example of sport, volunteering has become a 'commodity' to be bought and sold. The commodification of volunteering associated with sport, especially large event volunteering like the Olympic Games is very real. Volunteering now has a value. This was recognised, albeit slowly, from the mid-1980s onwards when governments began developing structures to support, analyse, protect and enhance it. Today at all levels of government, the rhetoric is about building social capital, capacity building and community participation. These are all ideals we have seen before, albeit presented in a different language, as the AAP story demonstrates. The profile of volunteering continues to improve, as events like National Volunteer Week attest. But as I hope I've shown today, volunteering has always been important in our history, indeed it is integral to the Australian way of life. The evidence is everywhere when you look for it, especially in the National Archives.

⁶⁷ Mark Lyons, *Third Sector*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 2001, especially p. 15.

⁶⁸ Melanie Oppenheimer, 'Controlling civilian volunteering: Canada and Australia during the Second World War', *War and Society*, vol. 22, no. 2, 2004, pp. 27-50.

⁶⁹ Jill Roe, 'The Australian Way', in Paul Smyth and Bettina Cass (eds), *Contesting the Australian Way: States, Markets and Civil Society*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1998, p. 71.

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