Who are the future volunteers in rural places? Understanding the demographic and background characteristics of non-retired rural volunteers, why they volunteer and their future migration intentions.

Abstract

This paper examines the demographic characteristics of the current pool of volunteers for rural areas and how volunteering relates to individuals' rural background, sense of connection to the community and future intentions to remain in the community. The paper uses data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics and a survey of rural households in the state of Western Australia. The survey received 10,444 valid responses and this paper used a subset of 6666 responses from the non-retired population. The analysis confirmed a high rate of volunteering in rural communities, and identified this was the case for both males and females across most age groups. The rural background of volunteers, the nature of their employment, family structure and their sense of community was associated with involvement in volunteering. The study revealed that an important volunteer cohort was planning to leave their community within a few years and a major reason for this planned outmigration was the lack of essential services in rural towns. We conclude that if governments wish to maintain or enhance the utilisation of local volunteers for essential and non-essential service delivery in rural areas, attention must be given to better supporting the existing rural volunteer workforce and to addressing the underlying causes of rural outmigration.

Highlights

- A greater proportion of the rural Western Australian population was involved in volunteering than the Australian population.
- Sense of community and connectedness is very important for those who volunteer.
- 50% of those indicating they were to leave their rural community in the survey had volunteered in the previous three months.
- Lack of essential services was the key reason for volunteers leaving their community.
- Further research is required to understand changes in the nature of volunteering in rural areas over the life course.

Keywords

Rural volunteers, rural outmigration, rural development.

1. Introduction

Rural communities across the world face significant and increasing challenges of economic, environmental and social adaption. The means through which rural communities can deal with change are limited, with reliance on the voluntary sector increasing (Imperiale and Vanclay, 2016; Skinner and Hanlon, 2016). In developed and developing countries, volunteering underpins the delivery of many essential services and in rural areas these include emergency services, healthcare and aged care. Importantly, rural communities are particularly dependent on local volunteers, as typically there are no alternative commercial providers for many essential services. This dependence has led researchers to question the sustainability of the rural volunteer workforce (Onyx and Leonard, 2010). However, the fragmented nature of the voluntary sector has made it difficult to capture the 'state of play' or to forecast future needs. This fragmentation is repeated in the scholarship on rural volunteering, where studies have focused on specific sectors or organisations including health services (Fahey et al., 2014), emergency services (McLennan et al., 2009), sports clubs (Tonts, 2005), art organisations (Jones and Birdsall-Jones, 2014), tourism (Davies, 2015; Edwards, 2012) and environmental management (Byron and Curtis, 2001; Lockstone-Binney et al., 2016).

Although the literature on rural volunteering is thematically fragmented, there is broad agreement that structural population ageing is a major threat to the sustainability of the rural volunteer workforce (Lewig et al., 2007; Skinner and Hanlon, 2016). The structural ageing of the population, it is argued, will cause

increased demand for volunteer provided services and reduce the pool of labour available to fill volunteer positions (Davies, 2011; Joseph and Skinner, 2012; Stockdale and MacLeod, 2013; Munoz et al., 2014). To ensure the sustainability of the rural volunteer workforce, evidence is needed about how demand for volunteer services and the volunteer labour supply will change in response to social, economic and demographic changes. This paper focuses on addressing the need for knowledge about supply side issues by documenting the demographic features and future intentions of the rural volunteer workforce in Australia.

The paper centres on examining volunteering in rural Western Australia. Rural Western Australia provides a useful and interesting setting to examine volunteering as, for over four decades, volunteers have had a heightened role in community and industry adaptation efforts (Davies, 2009; Davies and Oliver, 2017; Pick et al. 2011). During this period, the nature of activities undertaken by local volunteers has expanded from being primarily concerned with supporting social, cultural and infrastructure development to include being the primary agents for the delivery of many essential services including health care, social welfare, financial, governance and emergency services (Davies, 2009; Tonts and Jones, 1997). The Western Australian case study is also particularly useful as in recent years rural Australia has experienced an overall decline in volunteering. While on average, Australia's rural communities have had a higher rate of participation in volunteering than their urban counterparts (ABS, 2015), there has been a recorded net decrease in volunteering in

Australia¹ (ABS, 2015). The decline in volunteering coincides with a projected increased need for volunteers due to structural population ageing (Productivity Commission, 2013). However, as is the case for many countries, within Australia there is no system wide evidence to indicate the breadth and depth of involvement in volunteering. Little is known about participation rates for different age groups, why people are involved in local volunteer work and what factors might influence their likelihood to remain involved.

The paper draws on the results from a survey of rural residents in Western Australia as well as data compiled by the Australian Bureau of Statistics on volunteering. The survey of rural residents had 10,444 responses and is, we believe, the largest data set of this type. This paper focuses on the non-retired rural population, for which there were 7,451 survey respondents, 6666 who provided a valid response to a question about their volunteering status. Previously scholars have examined volunteering by older rural residents and also volunteering for ageing rural communities (Skinner et al., 2014; Skinner et al., 2016; Skinner and Hanlon, 2016; Skinner et al., 2017). Whilst focused on older residents, these studies have also identified there was a need to better understand the factors underpinning rural volunteer involvement at different phases of the life course, and as such this paper focuses on the non-retired volunteer workforce. In doing so, this paper seeks to extend knowledge about volunteering involvement for this cohort of the rural

¹ This trend is explained further in Section 3.

population, providing evidence of potential future supply side issues that may compromise the sustainability of the rural volunteer workforce.

2. Literature Review

Volunteering has been an enduring focus for researchers in considering the nature and functions of rural societies. Over the last four decades, as the state and private sector adjusted their models and scope of service provision in rural areas, the role for volunteers has also shifted (Rogers, 1987; Rochester et al., 2010; Winterton, 2014). Over this period there has been an increased reliance on volunteers to deliver a broader range of services within rural communities (Skinner et al., 2016).

A dominant theme across the rural volunteering scholarship maintains that rural volunteers have long had a critical role in the wellbeing of rural communities and in recent decades this role has diversified and responsibilities intensified. In one of the earliest papers to report on rural volunteering, Rogers (1987, p. 355) wrote 'Voluntarism, in both its formal and informal forms, pervades the whole of the rural sector' and commented that rural communities have long established traditions of volunteers delivering essential services. However, he noted that since the 1960s, volunteers have had a heightened role in 'self-help' initiatives. In a 1988 study, Banister and Norton also identified there had been a broadening of activities in which rural volunteers were involved. They linked this to the withdrawal of government provided services and a failure of the private sector to fill the resulting

void in service provision (Banister and Norton, 1988). The very considerable body of work published during in the 1990s that documented the major social and economic upheavals in rural communities in developed countries provided extensive case evidence for Banister and Norton's (1988) observation that the withdrawal of government services had necessitated a diversification and intensification of the responsibilities for rural volunteers (Jones and Tonts, 1995; Gray and Lawrence, 2001).

Cheshire (2000) (along with others including Peck and Tickell, 2002; Tonts and Jones, 1997; Tonts and Haslam-McKenzie, 2005; Milligan and Conradson, 2006; Edwards and Woods, 2006) theorised this broadening of service delivery responsibilities for rural dwellers resulted from the adoption of 'neo-liberal' ideologies in policies and programs for rural community service provision and community development. Cheshire observed that governments' had moved away from a focus on agricultural associated development strategies 'topped up' by social welfare programs to focusing more closely on the viability of rural communities. Savoie (2000, p. 7) described the broadening role for rural community volunteers as 'the latest fashion in regional development'. This shift in policy focus resulted in a change in approach to rural development 'based upon notions of individual and community responsibility, self-help and & bottom-up techniques' which empower the community and reduce its dependence on government structured programs (Cheshire, 2000, p. 203). Rural volunteering was placed at the forefront of rural adaptation and development programs and the burden for the viability of rural

communities was largely passed to rural communities (Wallington and Lawrence, 2008).

Since the early 2000s, a large body of work has been published that documents various community level responses to social, economic, political and environmental change. The expanded role for local volunteers to design and implement strategies for social wellbeing, economic adaption, service delivery and environmental protection has been normalised within much of this literature. For example, Breland (2005), in a review of the role of rural volunteers in delivering social welfare and support services for families, positioned volunteers as a resource that could be developed and shared between communities using appropriate governance frameworks. Delfmann et al. (2013) in a review of rural entrepreneurship and 'side activities' highlighted the critical role of local actors in sustaining bridging and bonding social capital. The voluntary participation of local residents in participating in side activities facilitated a space for social networking to be created. Examining themes similar to Delfmann et al. (2013), Nousiainen and Pylkkanen (2013) studied rural communities in Finland and argued that enhanced community involvement in designing and delivering essential and non-essential services was critical for rural identity formation and performance and this positively related to rural wellbeing. Edwards (2012) who examined rural festivals and Beel et al. (2017) who examined rural heritage echoed the arguments of Nousiainen and Pylkkanen.

Through documenting the broadening roles for rural volunteers and the factors that have underpinned this, researchers have identified the growing reliance on

volunteer labour as a risk for rural viability (Alston, 2002; Cloutier-Fisher and Skinner, 2006; Talbot and Walker, 2007; Skinner, 2008) despite programs being rolled out across rural spaces to equip rural dwellers with the skills to participate in endogenous community development initiatives (Davies, 2009). In particular, the intensification of reliance on volunteer labour has increased the vulnerability of rural communities to inadequate essential service provision. Moseley and Owen (2008) published the results of an ambitious study undertaken in 2005, which sought to set out various scenarios for service delivery in rural England for the year 2015. Drawing on extensive interviews with service providers and rural dwellers they concluded that volunteers would continue to have a critical and comprehensive role in both essential and non-essential service delivery. However, they commented that the voluntary sector could not respond to government's expectations for service delivery due to insufficient investment in capacity building and infrastructure (Moseley and Owen, 2008). With volunteers providing many essential services in rural communities such as emergency services, (McLennan et al., 2009), health care (Herron et al., 2016), education (Casto, 2016), community policing and crime prevention (Yarwood and Edwards, 1995) and transport (Banister and Norton, 1988), any decrease in volunteer supply or, conversely, increase in volunteer demand could undermine the capacity of some rural communities to deliver essential functions (Skinner et al., 2016).

With the now high level of dependency on rural volunteers for essential and other service delivery, there is a need to identify the factors that might undermine volunteer supply. As such, during the last decade, researchers have turned attention

to understanding the potential impacts that the forecasted ageing of the rural population will have for rural volunteering (Cloutier-Fisher and Skinner, 2006; Munoz et al., 2014). Typically, older members of rural communities have a higher level of participation in volunteer activities and are thought to carry much of the burden for essential service delivery (McKenzie and Frencken, 2001; Skinner and Hanlon, 2016). Older members of rural communities are also amongst the highest users of volunteer provided services, particularly social welfare and health care support. With rural populations being most vulnerable to structural ageing (Davies and James, 2011), the risks associated with the intensified reliance on volunteers for essential and non-essential has attracted research and policy attention.

Munoz et al. (2014) examined the relationships between rural population ageing and volunteering and found there was limited capacity to increase overall participation in volunteering because of, or in response to, structural ageing. With a more positive take on the involvement of older people in rural and regional areas, Davis et al. (2012) found that in rural communities with a declining population, the older population had a higher rate of participation in civic group and other forms of community engagement compared to communities with growing populations. They also found that older people who had lived in the community for many years were more likely to be involved in volunteer activities than newer residents (Munoz et al., 2014).

In considering the long term sustainability of the volunteer workforce it would be easy to assume that the ageing of the population would cause an increase in the size

of the volunteer workforce. However, also noting the complex factors underpinning volunteer demand and supply, Wilson (2012) found that the take up of volunteering due to retirement was rare, particularly if retirees had no history of volunteering (Wilson, 2012). Therefore, despite the reported higher participation rate in volunteering amongst older age groups, there can not be certainty that as the population ages, and more people enter retirement, the volunteer workforce will grow. Indeed, knowledge about participation in volunteering across the life course in rural settings remains limited.

While literature is somewhat piecemeal in its documentation of rural volunteering, there is agreement that the burden on volunteers to deliver essential and non-essential services has intensified. There is also a strong theme that the ageing of the rural population is set to deliver a two-fold disadvantage with the demand for volunteer services projected to increase in scope and complexity as the capacity of the population to deliver these decreases. To extend knowledge about the rural volunteer workforce, in this paper we turn the focus to supply side factors and examine the demographic features and the future intentions of the rural volunteer workforce. The spotlight is on the non-retired population as the relationship between participation in the rural volunteer workforce and age, gender, rural background and sense of connection to the community is examined. In drawing out this critical information about the rural volunteer workforce, this paper provides evidence of supply side issues that may compromise the future sustainability of the rural volunteer workforce.

3. Background to Volunteering Supply in Australia

Volunteering work in Australia has been estimated to be worth in excess of \$43 billion per year (ABS, 2017). Data about volunteering has been collected by the Australian Bureau of Statistics as part of the Australian Housing and Population Census (AHPC) and as part of the General Social Survey. The AHPC, which is a compulsory survey of the entire Australian resident population, asked 'In the last twelve months did the person spend any time doing voluntary work through an organisation or group²?'. In 2006, 2.85 million people indicated they volunteered, while in 2016 3.62 million indicated they volunteered. As a proportion of the national population, between 2006 and 2016 there was just over a net 1% increase in involvement in volunteering, increasing from 14.35% to 15.47% of the population. Figure 1 shows that in the decade from 2006, the volunteering participation rate for males increased in almost every age group. Over the same period, the volunteering participation rate for females also increased in most age categories with the exception of those aged 60-69 years. The data collected by the AHPC does not

² The question on the APHC specified that voluntary work included for sporting teams, youth groups, schools or religious organisations. It excluded work in a family business or paid employment. It also excluded work undertaken in order to qualify for a government benefits or to obtain an educational qualification or due to a community or court order.

INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

provide information about the intensity of volunteering involvement or the type of activities individuals were involved in.

Information about the intensity of volunteering involvement and the type of activities individuals were involved in was collected through the Australian Bureau of Statistics' General Social Survey (GSS). The General Social Survey collects data about a range of social, demographic and economic issues of a sample of the Australian population, with a sample size of approximately 12,000 people. The survey is conducted every 4 years. The results of the 2010 GSS revealed a volunteering rate of 38% and the 2014 GSS revealed a rate of 31%. Despite the recorded decline in volunteering, both the 2010 and 2014 results revealed an overall higher level of involvement in volunteering than recorded in the APHC. The GSS identified that 5.79 million people had been involved in volunteering in the previous 12 months or about 31% of the population aged over 15 years. The GSS also revealed a higher rate of volunteering involvement in rural areas, with rural areas recording a volunteer rate of 34% compared to 31% recorded for major metropolitan areas in 2014.

Importantly, as noted above, the GSS used a sample of the Australian population. The sample was selected to ensure that the margin of error was minimised to approximately 10% for any of the estimates. The sampling strategy included only people aged 15 years or older and who were usual residents of private dwellings. It did not include very remote parts of Australia or discrete Indigenous communities (located in remote Australia). Furthermore, the sampling strategy was adapted to target socio-economically disadvantaged households, meaning these households

had a higher probability of being selected. The final key difference between the APHC and the GSS is that participation in the GSS was voluntary, whereas the APHC was compulsory. One or more of the factors of difference between the APHC and GSS could explain the difference in recorded volunteering rate. Nevertheless, despite the seeming overrepresentation of volunteering involved people in the GSS sample, the GSS provides useful information on the nature of volunteering in Australia.

The estimated data for volunteering involvement in Australia from the GSS (2014) revealed that the highest concentration of volunteer involvement was with sport and recreation organisations, with more than 30% of the population participating (Table 1). 27% of the population was involved in 'other' organisations and 24% were involved in training and education organisations. Considering the type of activities volunteers were involved in, more than 20% of the population was involved in fundraising and 15% involved in teaching and instruction. Despite the high proportion of people involved in sport and recreation organisations (31.1%), only 13.6% were involved in coaching, refereeing and judging, indicating the broader role for volunteers in these types of organisations. While most people involved in volunteering were involved in only one organisation, more than 20% were involved in two organisations and a further 14% were involved in three or more organisations.

The GSS collected information on why people were involved in volunteering, revealing that most volunteers did so to help others and/ or their community. Additionally, important to volunteers was that volunteering provided personal satisfaction and was regarded as something worthwhile to do (Table 2). Importantly,

only 8% reported feeling obligated to volunteer and interestingly only 10% volunteered as a way of gaining work experience. Despite the insights gained by the GSS, what remains unclear how involvement in volunteering and reason for involvement may differ across geographies or by gender and age groups.

A 2016 survey of volunteering and giving in Australia, commissioned by the Australian Government's Department of Social Services reported that 43.7% of the population had been involved in volunteering in the previous year (McGregor-Lowndes et al., 2017). Called the 'Giving Australia 2016' survey, the sample, approach and questions were considerably different to the APHC and GSS and so the data can not reliably be compared across surveys. The Giving Australia survey did not disaggregate the data captured to enable comparative analysis of volunteering in metropolitan and rural settlements or between settlement size. Another 2016 survey of Australian volunteers, conducted by Price Waterhouse Coopers (PWC) on behalf of Volunteering Australia, involved a sample of 3,044. While this survey did not report an overall volunteering rate it did identify factors that influence the nature of volunteering involvement. Importantly, the PWC survey focused on volunteer involved people and did not specifically seek to include a representative sample of rural residents in the sample. Furthermore, as with the Giving Australia 2016 survey and GSS, the data could not be spatially disaggregated to facilitate an investigation into rural volunteering.

Insert Table 1 About Here

Insert Table 2 About Here

4. Unpacking Volunteering in Rural Western Australia

Data from the APHC indicated that in 2016 a higher proportion of rural western Australian's (for brevity WA hereafter) volunteered than counterparts in Greater Perth, the State's capital. For both those living in Greater Perth and Rural WA it was observed that more females volunteered than males and that involvement in volunteering was highest when people were aged 40 to 80 years, as shown in Figure 2. However, beyond this data and the general conclusions about volunteering that can be drawn from the GSS, Giving Australia and PWC surveys, little is known about the nature of volunteering in rural Western Australia.

Insert Figure 2 About Here

To gain further insight into the demographic character of the rural WA volunteer workforce, data collected through a 2013 survey of that rural population conducted by the WA Government Department of Regional Development (DRD) was examined. With a population of about 550,000, rural WA is sparsely settled with only 21 per cent of WA's population living outside of the capital city of Perth. Rural Western Australia is dominated by dry land agricultural activities and mining, with many small, remote settlements established to support these activities. The DRD sought to ensure a wide cross-section of the rural community participated in the survey and so the questionnaire was available in both paper and online formats. The online format was hosted on the DRD website. 40,000 copies of the questionnaire were mailed to randomly selected rural residents. In addition, 5,000 copies were provided to

regional agencies and local governments so that people who could not access the online questionnaire could participate. The survey commenced on 22 April 2013 and closed on 31 May 2013. In total 10,444 valid responses were received.

This paper focuses on the responses received from non-retired members of the population 18 years or older. The questionnaire asked participants 'In the past three months how often have you performed some local volunteer work'. Participants were provided with three options to select from for their answer: never, once, more than once. There were 6,666 responses received to this question. Additional questions asked about participant's demographics (gender, age, work and family), length of time living in regional WA, reasons for living in regional WA, likelihood to stay and, if they planned to leave, reasons for leaving.

The data were sorted and basic frequency analysis was conducted to identify demographic characteristics of the rural volunteer workforce. Pearson's chi-square test for relatedness was used to examine if significant differences existed between the demographic profile of the non-volunteer population and volunteer workforce. Pearson's chi-square test was also used to examine volunteer status in relation to length of time living in a community, origin of residence, reasons for living in rural WA, sense of community satisfaction and plans to leave the region in the future.

The results revealed a high level of participation in local volunteer work, with 66% of the non-retired population indicating they had participated in local volunteer work within the previous three months, which contrasts with the national average of 31%

as reported in the 2014 GSS and that recorded by the APHC. As the LITR survey was entirely voluntary, it may be the case that people who were disinclined to volunteer were less likely to complete the survey resulting in an underrepresentation of those who did not volunteer.

In examining the LITR data and considering age profile of the non-retired volunteer workforce it was found that, except for the 20-29 age group, over 60% of the members of each age group had recently performed local volunteer work (Table 3). The group recording the highest participation rate were those aged over 70 years. However, notably one of highest rates of participation was for those aged 18-20 years. Pearson's analysis of the relationship between age and participation in local volunteer work resulted in $\chi^2 (12, n = 6666) = 65.057, p < .001$. This significant result confirms a relationship between age and participation in local volunteer work with the likelihood of participation in volunteering amongst the non-retired population increasing for older age groups.

The sample of regional WA residents revealed a greater involvement of females in rural volunteering activities. A Pearson's chi-square analysis of the relationship between gender and volunteer participation found that $\chi^2 (2, n = 6626) = 30.798, p < .001$, with the relationship influenced by higher female participation in local volunteer work in both the 'more than once' and 'once' in three month categories. This finding supports the work of Little (2007), Midgley (2006) and Davis et al. (2012), amongst others, which found that in rural areas females have a higher level of participation in community activities than males.

To examine if having family caring responsibilities influenced participation in volunteering, the relationship between having children at home and participation in local volunteer work was considered. Pearson's chi-square analysis revealed there was a significant relationship, with $\chi^2 (2, n=6666) = 41.671, p < .001$, with those with children at home more likely to have participated in local volunteer work. One might assume these people would have limited time due to competing paid work and family priorities, yet they still found time to volunteer. Extending this line of inquiry, the data were examined to assess if there was a significant relationship between the age of the children at home and participation in local volunteer work. Interestingly, there was only a significant relationship observed for those with children aged 6 – 12 years with a Pearson's chi-square analysis finding that $\chi^2 (2, n=3205) = 34.185, p < .001$. Although it was beyond the survey to delineate between types of volunteering activity, it is reasonable to expect a link between children's school and after-school activities and parent volunteer involvement for this age group (as asserted by Casto, 2016).

Insert Table 3 here

Considering if employment had a relationship to participation in local volunteer work, overall 65% of those who were unemployed volunteered compared to 66% of those who were employed. There was no significant relationship observed between employment status and participation in local volunteer work, a finding previously observed by Warburton and Stirling (2007).

While overall employment status had no significant association with volunteer participation, participation was influenced by the nature of work people were engaged in, with χ^2 (6585, n=18) 147.685, $p < .001$. By job type, the highest rate of participation in local volunteer work was for farm workers, with 80% indicating they had participated in local volunteer work. Participation was also high for other job groups with 70% of small business owners and government workers, 66% of those engaged in home duties, 65% of manager/ supervisors, 65% of professionals, 63% of those involved in clerical and sales and 53% of skilled tradespersons reporting having performed local volunteer work at least once in the previous three months.

5. Factors Affecting Participation in Local Volunteer Work

Volunteering has long been critical to the formation of community identity and social bonds and while volunteers have long had a role in services delivery this has been heightened in recent decades (Milligan and Fyfe, 2004; Cloutier-Fisher and Skinner, 2006; Skinner and Hanlon, 2016). The relative isolation of many rural communities means that participation in local volunteering can enhance residents' connection to place and, as Nousiainen and Pylkkanen (2013) argued, a sharing of the risks of living in rural areas. The survey data were interrogated to examine if participants' rural background, perception about sense of community and experience of community connectedness related to participation in local volunteer work.

The questionnaire asked participants about the number of years they had lived in rural WA (see Table 4). Considering this variable by engagement in local volunteer work revealed a significant Pearson's chi-square test, $\chi^2 (10, n=6549) = 93.118, p < .001$. The data revealed that that long-term rural residents were more likely than newer residents to have volunteered. People who had lived in rural WA for between one and five years were least likely to have performed a local volunteer activity.

The questionnaire asked participants about how they came to live in rural WA. People born in the area were the most likely to have volunteered. Others with a strong regional connection, including people that had moved from a town within their current region, people that had moved to the region from another region in rural WA and people that had moved from Perth (the WA State capital) but grew up in regional WA all had high rates of participation in local volunteering. Conversely, those with little previous connection with regional WA showed lower participation rates, with those who had moved from overseas or interstate the least likely to have volunteered. A Pearson's chi square test for the relationship between rural background and participation in local volunteer work revealed a significant relationship where $\chi^2 (18, n=6615) = 64.158, p < .001$.

Insert Table 4 here

There are a range of reasons why people live in rural areas and these reasons can relate to participation in community activities. The questionnaire asked why people lived in regional WA. Participants were provided with 14 options and were asked to

select the most important category to them. Table 5 shows respondents' most important reason for living in regional WA by their participation in local volunteer work. Table 5 also contains the Pearson's value for each 'reason' by participation in local volunteer work.

Insert Table 5 here

The data revealed that the most important reason for participants living in regional WA was lifestyle, with 25% of respondents selecting this option. Importantly, 46% of those who selected this option had recently performed a volunteer activity more than once, while 35% indicated they had not participated in local volunteer work. This finding supports previous research that links higher levels of social embeddedness and attachment to place to greater involvement in community activities (Ryan et al., 2005). The second most frequently selected reason for living in regional WA was for 'work commitments', with 17% of respondents selecting this as the most important reason. Interestingly, those who selected work as most important were more likely to have participated in local volunteer work than those that selected lifestyle. That noted, the highest rate of performance of local volunteer work was recorded for those who selected 'the sense of community' as the most important reason for living in their community. For this group (five per cent of total respondents), 83% had performed local volunteer work within the previous three months.

Extending this line of inquiry, survey participants were asked to rate 'how happy do you feel with the sense of community' on a scale from one (very unhappy) to 10 (very happy). Considering respondents happiness in relation to their participation in local volunteer work, a Pearson's chi square analysis found $\chi^2(18, N=6599) = 468.928, p < .001$. Informing this relationship was the 67% of the sample that indicated they were 'very happy' with the sense of community in their locality and also volunteered.

Associated with the concept of sense of community, is the notion of community connectedness. As with sense of community, researchers have argued that people who participate in local community activities can experience a greater connection with their community. The results provide evidence of this relationship with a Pearson's chi-square test of participants' responses to the question 'how connected do you feel to the local community' (on a scale from one (very unhappy) to 10 (very happy)) and their participation in local volunteer work resulting in $\chi^2(18, N=6625) = 786.741, p < .001$.

Collectively, these findings indicate that the reasons non-retired people in rural WA engage in volunteering are bound up in a sense of community and lifestyle afforded to them in the rural setting. The data also indicated that participation in volunteering could be related to rural background and sector of employment, with those with a rural background and farm workers having the highest rates of participation in the rural volunteer workforce.

The LITR survey did not ask participants questions about the number of hours they were involved in volunteering, the regularity of their participation, the types of activities they were involved in or the geographic coverage of their volunteering. Therefore, while the LITR data provides initial evidence for a relationship between volunteering involvement and age, employment, rural background and sense of connectedness to community, future research is needed to interrogate the nature of these relationships to various types of volunteering activity.

6. Future Migration Intentions of the Rural Volunteer Workforce

The increased reliance of rural communities on volunteers to deliver essential and non-essential services and also to promote and enhance community identity and wellbeing has heightened concerns regarding the sustainability of the volunteer workforce. Given evidence that rural volunteer organisations are struggling with recruitment and retention, there is an imperative to better understand the intentions of the existing non-retired rural volunteer workforce and how this might affect volunteer labour supply in the near future (Bryon and Curtis, 2001; Lewig et al., 2007; Huynh et al., 2013).

The LITR survey asked participants about their plans to remain or move away from their rural community. Specifically, participants were asked about their plans to leave – if, for example, they were planning on leaving within two years or in more than ten years (Table 6). Of concern to WA's rural communities, 408 people planning to leave within two years had recently participated in local volunteer work. This

group represented 9 % of the volunteer workforce. More positively, 68% of respondents who indicated they had no plans to move had volunteered once or more within the last three months.

Insert Table 6 here

For those respondents that indicated that they were planning on leaving their rural region, they were asked to indicate a reason for their move. Recognising that the factors that underpin migration decisions are complex, participants were asked about 'personal reasons' 'family and friend reasons' and 'work, costs, services reasons' (listed in Table 7). Participants could select multiple factors as being important (or not). They could also answer only part of the question, hence the variable number of responses recorded for each of the 'factors'.

Focusing on those who indicated they were moving for a personal reason, the two most frequently nominated personal reasons were (in order): 'I just want a change' (selected by 775), and; 'this community can feel lonely' (selected by 654). More than half of these people indicated they had recently participated in local volunteer work. Tellingly, when considering participants' responses to the item 'I do not feel connected to this community' by recent participation in local volunteer work it was found those who had not volunteered were more likely to be moving away because the lack of community connection (where $\chi^2(2, N=2762) = 64.980, p < .001$).

Focusing on the factors related to family and friends, the most frequently nominated factor informing participants' decisions to move away from their community were access to schooling (selected by 776) and quality of schooling (selected by 775). Of concern to rural WA communities about 70% of those who nominated schooling factors had recently participated in a volunteer activity. This finding tentatively suggests that restricted schooling opportunities in rural communities are undermining the sustainability of the volunteer workforce.

The questions about work, costs and services revealed telling signs of the contemporary challenges that face rural dwellers and their outmigration decisions. Over 1600 people indicated that access to shopping was a reason influencing their decision to migrate and 1400 indicated access to health services was an important factor. Over 1000 people nominated quality of health services, cost of living and access to professional development. Of the respondents who selected these factors, over 50% had recently volunteered. These data indicate that many rural dwellers cannot access an adequate level of basic services and that these shortfalls are driving their outmigration.

Insert Table 7 here

6. Conclusion: Who are the Future Volunteers in Rural Places?

Volunteering is vital for rural communities in building and maintaining a sense of community and also in delivering essential community services. However, little is

known about who rural volunteers are and how sustainable the rural volunteer workforce is in the face of increasing responsibilities. This paper considered the supply side factors currently shaping the nature of the rural volunteer workforce. When considered with studies that report on future demand, the results from this study provide critical insight into the future sustainability of the rural volunteering workforce.

The paper drew on data collected by the Australian Bureau of Statistics in the APHC and the GSS. It also used data from the LITR survey of rural WA residents.

Considered individually, none of these three sources of data enables a robust understanding of rural volunteering to be developed. Combining information from the three sources enables critical insights to be developed, however limitations in knowledge do remain.

This study revealed that rural communities have a higher number of people involved in volunteering than urban counterparts, that involvement in volunteering is highest for those aged over 40 (excluding those in late old age) and women are more involved in volunteering than men. Data from the LITR survey revealed that non-retired people with a rural background were the most likely to have participated in local volunteer work. It also found that length of time living in rural WA was related to participation in local volunteering activities, with those who were new to the area the least likely to volunteer. Perhaps associated with length of association with rural WA, the survey revealed those with the strongest sense of satisfaction with 'sense of community' were the most likely to have participated in local volunteer work. This

suggests that volunteering had an important role in enabling these long term residents to maintain their involvement with, and connection to, community. On the other hand, the results brought to light a potential that exists within the rural population to enhance the overall participation rate in the volunteer workforce by improving the rate of involvement of newer residents.

The study found those who were employed in the farming sector and small business owners were the most involved in the local volunteer workforce. Given this, when examining the long term sustainability of the rural volunteer workforce it would be important to pay particular attention to the pressures on farm workers and small businesses and how pressures in these sectors relate to volunteer retention and participation.

The study revealed that an important proportion of volunteers planned to leave their community. The outmigration of people who carry considerable volunteer workloads would likely have a detrimental impact on remaining volunteers, potentially increasing their workload. It would also have an acute impact on those rural communities dependent on volunteers for the delivery of essential services. These communities are the smallest and, therefore, the likelihood of commercial providers filling any void left by volunteers would be small.

Perhaps telling of the problems faced by many rural communities in developed countries, the leading reasons people were planning to move away from their rural community related to the lack of essential services. Over 50% of those planning to

move due to the lack of essential services indicated they were involved in the local volunteer workforce. The withdrawal of direct government support for community services in rural areas and the subsequent heightened reliance on volunteer labour is doubly problematic with many of those now critical to service provision seeking to move elsewhere to improve their own access to these essential services.

If governments wish to maintain or enhance the utilisation of local volunteers for essential and non-essential service delivery in rural areas, better support is needed for the existing rural volunteer workforce and attention should be given to addressing the underlying causes of outmigration. Given the observed difference in participation rates in volunteer activities of the different age groups, and the finding those with young children in the home are particularly active in local volunteer activities, there is a need to further investigate how the pressures of involvement in volunteer work differ across the life course. Such a study would provide additional insight into the overall sustainability of the rural volunteer workforce, particularly in the context of population ageing. Furthermore, as noted earlier in this paper, there remains a gap in knowledge about how the intensity and nature of volunteering relates to demographic and geographic factors as well as sense of connection to the local community and future intentions to migrate. To develop a comprehensive understanding of rural volunteering and thereby inform effective policy development, this information is required.

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Figure 1: Australia's volunteering participation rate in 2006 and 2016 by age and gender.

Source: ABS, 2017

Figure 2: Percentage of the area's population that volunteered by age and gender for Greater Perth and rural Western Australia, 2016.

Source: ABS, 2017

Table 1: Estimated proportion of volunteers involved in different types of volunteering activities and organisations, for Australia and Western Australia, 2014.

	<i>Australian population</i>	<i>Western Australia</i>
Types of organisations in which unpaid voluntary work was undertaken in previous 12 months, reported as % of total population		
Sport and recreation	31.1	32.6
Welfare/ community	21.2	18.7
Religious	18.9	14.3
Education and training	23.9	27.0
Health	10.2	7.4
Other	27.1	27.8
Type of voluntary activity in which most time was spent on in previous 12 months, reported as % of total population		
Administration/ recruitment/ information management	12.4	9.7
Coaching/ refereeing/ judging	13.6	16.3
Befriending/ supportive listening/ counselling/ mentoring	9.6	8.7
Fundraising/ sales	23.2	23.3
Food preparation/ serving	13.6	14.0
Repairing/ maintenance/ gardening	9.1	7.2
Management/ committee work/ coordination	12.4	16.7
Teaching/ instruction/ providing information	15.0	13.9
Other	21.4	20.9
Number of organisations volunteered in over previous 12 months, reported as a % of total volunteering population		
One organisation	62.6	64.6
Two organisations	23.6	25.1
Three or more organisations	13.7	10.8

Source: ABS, 2015.

Table 2: Estimated proportion of volunteers involved in volunteering activities by reason why involved, for Australia and Western Australia, 2014.

Reasons for being a volunteer	% of Australian volunteering population	% of Western Australian volunteering population
Personal / family involvement	45.2	47.9
Personal satisfaction	57.1	58.9
Social contact	36.7	37.4
Religious beliefs	17.4	14.7
To be active	35.2	36.1
To learn new skills	22.6	25.1
To do something worthwhile	53.8	56.1
Help others / community	63.8	64.3
Gain work experience	10.4	11.8
Use skills / experience	30.7	30.4
Felt obliged	8.4	9.4
Just happened	12.3	11.7

Source: ABS, 2015.

Table 3: Percentage of the non-retired population who participated in a local volunteer activity within the last three months

	Percentage of people in each age group							
	18-20	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70 +	Total
Participated at least once	67	58	66	68	64	68	74	66
Never participated	33	42	34	32	36	32	26	34

Table 4: Number of years lived in rural WA by participation in a local volunteer activity in the last three months

Number of years lived in regional WA	Participation in a local volunteer activity in the last 3 months						
	<i>Never</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Once</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>More than once</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Total</i>
Less than 1	51	38	32	24	49	37	132
1-5	394	45	147	17	336	38	877
6-10	316	38	136	16	382	46	834
11-15	196	33	98	17	296	50	590
16-20	183	35	85	16	254	49	522
20+	1103	31	567	16	1924	54	3594
Total	2243	34	1065	16	3241	49	6549

Table 5: Most important reason for living rural Western Australia by participated in local volunteer work last three months

	Number of people who volunteered			Total	Pearson's Chi Square*	P value
	<i>Never</i>	<i>Once</i>	<i>More than once</i>			
This is my country	166	81	277	524	13.048	0.001
My partner lives here	229	107	344	680	17.168	0.000
I feel safer here than in large city	115	45	132	292	21.562	0.000
I moved here to escape a small town	13	2	4	19	14.408	0.001
I moved here to escape population growth/ rat race	170	77	197	444	15.992	0.000
I believe I have a better chance of meeting a potential partner here	2	2	2	6	2.053	0.358
Living here is good for my health	29	20	53	102	27.193	0.000
Living here is good for me financially	198	73	149	420	14.094	0.001
It is a really friendly place to live	50	33	97	180	162.1	0.000
The climate	39	16	43	98	0.331	0.848
The clean environment	37	22	93	152	50.845	0.000
The lifestyle	482	273	638	1393	35.499	0.000
The sense of community	21	37	235	293	480.746	0.000
Work commitments	318	139	516	973	7.227	0.027
Total	1869	927	2780	5576	-	-

*Degrees of freedom = 2. This question permitted multiple responses from participants.

Table 6: Nature of plans to move (or not) by participation in a local volunteer activity in last three months

	Number of people who participated in a local volunteer activity			
	<i>Never</i>	<i>Once</i>	<i>More than once</i>	<i>Total</i>
No plans to move	925	476	1546	2947
Don't know	177	68	220	465
Plan to stay indefinitely	140	74	278	492
No time frame but will probably move	381	172	441	994
Will move in less than 2 years	240	116	292	648
Will move within 2-5 years	228	89	233	550
Will move within 6-10 years	158	71	211	440
Will move in more than 10 years	38	26	66	130
Total	2287	1092	3287	6666

Table 7: Personal reasons for those who are moving by participation in a local volunteer activity in last three months

Personal reasons	Family and friend reasons	Work, cost and service reasons
My partner lives elsewhere	Access to schooling	Access to age care
Looking for a more sophisticated lifestyle	Safer for children	Access to health services
Looking for a simpler lifestyle	Closer to family	Access to shopping
I do not feel connected to this community	Closer to friends	Access to communications and internet
Better chance of meeting a potential partner	Better childcare options elsewhere	Access to professional development
I just want a change	Quality of schooling	Earn more
Different climate		Better career
Want to move back		Job security
Move to somewhere where the environment is cleaner		Cost of housing
Move to somewhere where there is less crime		Cost of living
There is a lot of division in this community		Quality of health services
This community can be lonely		Retirement options