



# Volunteering Tweed

A division of Tweed Training & Enterprise Company Ltd

Volunteering Tweed is thrilled to announce that it has just interviewed its 300th volunteer. It was even more pleasing to note that the volunteer is a 17 year old - VT's youngest volunteer to date! This throws out a challenge to all Tweed residents of any age - you can volunteer too!

It is a perfect time to consider volunteering as Volunteering Tweed is now conducting regular information sessions and interviews at Kingscliff, Pottsville Beach, Tweed Heads and of

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**Volunteering—benefiting the whole community!**

## Putting up their hands

### Volunteering proves fulfilling option for big variety of people

SUE Larkin might be forgiven for thinking she has the best job in the world.

In less than 12 months she has helped to interview nearly 400 people and place them in a position that suits their needs and interests.

Some go horse riding, others dress up as a fruit for the Murwillumbah Banana Festival or help amateur tennis. A few have even applied a wall-paper mural.

The jobs can be fun, involving and offer both important life-skills and recognised training.

There is only one catch - Sue's job and all the others she offers are unpaid.

She is a volunteer co-ordinator at Volunteering Tweed, located in Numinah Street, Murwillumbah and she aims to match people up with the many volunteering opportunities available in Tweed and the southern Gold Coast.

Sue has since gained part-time employment on the strength of the skills she acquired while working at Volunteering Tweed but continues to offer her services to the organisation between one and three days a week.

"I opted to do the mother thing and I haven't worked since 1994," she said.

"It doesn't look good on your resume and while I know I am reasonably switched on, it was hard to convince prospective

By DEIRORE SMITH

employers of that when I had been out of the workforce for some years."

A recent arrival in the area, Sue took the position with Volunteering Tweed when it began 16 months ago, both to acquire new skills and to establish connections in the community. Initially she was involved in recruiting organisations that used volunteers and establishing work flow systems. Once the doors opened in October last year, she took on the tasks of interviewing and matching volunteers with positions, training volunteers and supporting the outreach officers of Volunteering Tweed in Kingscliff and Tweed Heads.

It was while she was conducting an information session, one of many she does at places such as Centrelink and Job Network offices, that she met the manager of the Beachcomber Resort in Coolangubra and was offered a job there.

"My resume looks brilliant now compared to what it was like before," she said.

"I've also developed strong links in the community. I have a list of referees as long as your arm."

Volunteering Tweed manager Richard Patterson said not all volunteers offered their time in the hope of finding a job.

Volunteers and the

reasons for volunteering cover every possible permutation from school leavers looking for direction to retired executives looking to run a community organisation just as efficiently as they did a public company.

"We've seen everyone from a retired soldier to a guy with a dingo and a didgeridoo," he said.

"We have 18-year-olds who have never had a job looking to explore options, people with good qualifications who have just moved into the area and are looking to network and professional people who want to change their career path."

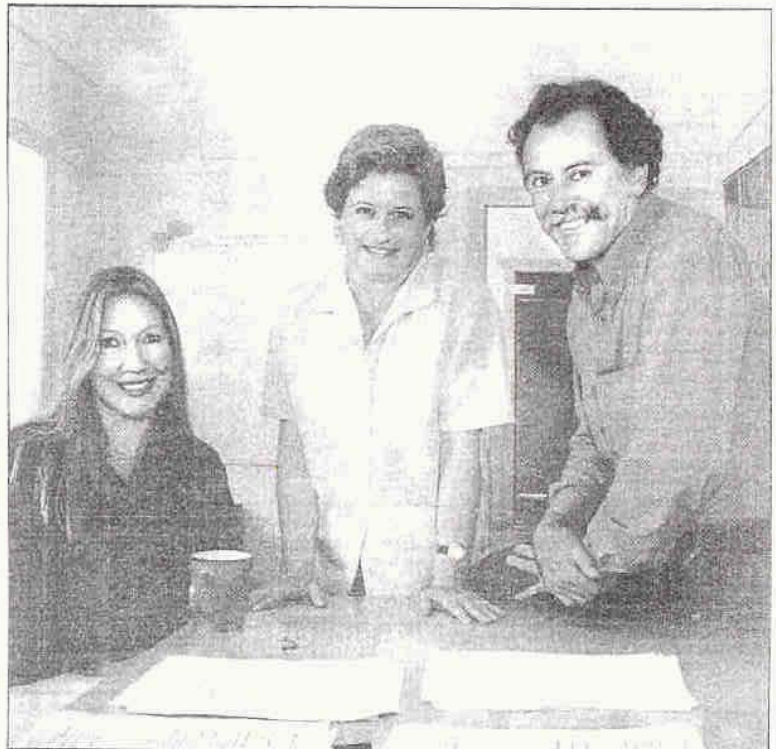
"We had one man go from information technology into counselling and a scientist who was stuck in a laboratory all day go into environmental projects."

Mr Patterson said one man, a retired accountant, had come in offering to do bookkeeping for local groups but the interview process revealed that he was a keen musician and he was able to be placed as an entertainer for elderly care residents.

"The vast majority of people are stunned at the range of volunteer positions," he said.

"There are rigorous research and development projects, you can be a media liaison officer, things that involve a vast range of skills and challenges."

Terri Mann, also a volunteer with the service since it began 16 months ago, compiles the list of volunteer openings.



ROUND PEGS, ROUND HOLES ... Volunteering Tweed co-ordinator Sue Larkin, volunteer Terri Mann and manager Richard Patterson help people find organisations which need their skills.

Interviewing volunteers is not as straightforward as it seems, she said, as people often have no idea of the vast range of possibilities and their expectations must match with the needs of the organisation.

"There is no point sending someone who loves animals to work in the animal shelter if they will only become distressed when animals are put down."

After being interviewed and matched with

a position, volunteers are instructed in their rights and responsibilities and those of the organisation, along with the perils and pitfalls of volunteering.

"People can be very well-intentioned, they want to change the world today," said Mr Patterson.

"We have to create realistic expectations of their role as a volunteer."

"They have to fit in with the organisation, their ethos and directions.

"Often people don't realise that they have to commit to the organisation, they can't just do it when they feel like it."

Follow-up with both the volunteer and the organisation is done within one month, to ensure the placement is working well.

"We want a round peg in a round hole, we want people to be happy," he said.

Volunteering Tweed usually has more than 100 vacancies registered at

any one time, including office and administration work, caring for people with disabilities and the elderly, driving, gardening, umpiring sport and counselling amongst other openings. While many positions involve a regular and ongoing commitment, people can also register for special events such as the Banana Festival and Speed on Tweed.

Volunteering Tweed can be contacted on (02) 6672 8288.