An exploration of volunteer attrition in the Hunter region: Implications for volunteer sector managers

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This dissertation is submitted for the degree

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Declaration

I hereby certify that the work embodied in this dissertation project is the result of original research and has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other university or institution.

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Synopsis

This project uses a qualitative research design to explore and describe how volunteer attrition is perceived and managed by volunteer sector managers in the Hunter region. The research was considered important as it addressed an identified need for more research around the retention of volunteers to avoid the interruptions in or loss of services (Haski-Leventhal & Bargal, 2008; Skoglund, 2006; Vinton, 2012). The data was collected using focus groups of volunteer managers and interviews with selected volunteer sector stakeholders. Thematic analysis was employed to identify and describe the impact of attrition of volunteers on specific not-for-profit organisations in the Hunter region, NSW, Australia. This analysis also identifies and evaluates the effectiveness of specific attrition management strategies that managers of these organisations have employed. The findings of this research is that the key to effective volunteer attrition management is a broad-based respect for the volunteers and managers of volunteers, and flexible approaches to volunteer management such as incorporating transition management techniques to handle the increase in episodic volunteers. There is a need to look beyond human resource management techniques to find solutions as attitudes toward volunteering change and individuals become more selective of the volunteering opportunities they accept. Some effective strategies that are being employed by managers of volunteers, such as treating volunteers as staff, empowering volunteers and giving authentic recognition, are important and require strong relationship skills amongst managers of volunteers.