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Give, Advocate, Volunteer

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## Life lessons - helping children reach their potential

Imagine for a moment that you are at the start of a 100 metre running race. There's a large crowd that have come to see you run and you are running with other people who are the same age and level of fitness as you are. You walk into the arena, line up at the starting line and then to your surprise an official informs you that you are actually starting 20 metres behind everyone else. What's more you will be running with a 10 kg backpack. The gun fires and you do your best but become disheartened mid way through because you realise that despite your efforts you are never going to catch up. How do you feel? I reckon I would be quite angry at the racing officials and maybe even the other runners...and I probably wouldn't ever run in something like that again.

In many ways this metaphor speaks a truth for so many kids I have worked with over the years that come from tough communities. In Australia today, 1 in 5 kids from our toughest communities start school on their first day as though they are not only starting 20 metres behind the starting line but are carrying a 10 kg backpack. They are in this position because in the human lottery of life they've been born into a family unable to provide them with the opportunities to help their little minds start developing through simple things like being read to each night or learning how to count the cars as you travel on the bus. Research shows that the first day of school is very often the One Day that sets a course for the child's future because the extent to which a child is prepared for this day is the extent to which the child will reach their potential at school.

When children don't reach their potential, it is unfair for the child and costs the broader community. United Way Australia is keenly aware of these issues. In 2009 we took a hard look at our community and realised that in order to make real changes, we needed to root out the underlying causes of these situations - and then address them.

We worked with partners such as the Centre for Social Impact to identify needs and determine the evidence base for an effective response. Our work over the last year has been to develop and identify opportunities for our partners to measurably improve the lives of people in most need.

We have been encouraged by the commitment of many of our partners in local communities willing to partner with us to create change. For example our Education Coalition in Claymore, Campbelltown, with the NSW Department of Housing and Good Beginnings.

Good Beginnings provides practical, community-based parenting support programs to ensure children get the best start in life. It targets children in vulnerable and hard to reach communities through early intervention services and programs that are adaptive to the needs of the child, the family and the community, with a key focus on the formative years. This means they work with communities to find suitable solutions to issues that impact on families. Staff and trained volunteers run playgroups and other community-based programs like 'Ready Set School' and 'McReadie Playgroup' to give parents the knowledge, support and confidence to provide their children with the care they need. Trust is also built over time so that parents can open up and share any particular issues they may be experiencing. Ultimately these programs are changing people's lives.

"For Claymore families in need, life can be very dismal - no hope, no reason to work or to go to school. The majority of kids that I see are bright and want to do more than people think with their lives. They just need direction, encouragement and affirmation. I have high hopes for the families I work with who are willing to access local services to help them reach their potential and become more independent. Children that really do want to complete high school and get to university or get a good job." Jesse Garcia, Community Worker.

"With the support of United Way Australia and funding, we could get more services up and running and Claymore would grow significantly. My aim is to increase literacy and engagement in education so these young people can make a difference in their own lives."

"In the time I have been working in Claymore I have seen what difference we can make to people's lives. One young man who was not in any type of education or work 3 years ago recently came up to me,

tapped me on the shoulder and said 'I'm attending a course and doing much better now Jesse.' I also have a mum and 3 year old son who are part of the Ready Set School program. When they started the son was very shy and would not get involved. Now every Monday he comes and he is the first one there and looks forward to every visit. His social skills have come on leaps and bounds and he gives people hugs and is much more outgoing. His mum is very supportive but she was also an introvert at the beginning of the program. Now she gets engaged with other mums - they looking forward to seeing others and seeing me - it's all about giving them affirmation and confidence. They are capable and can achieve so much if they want to."

To support our work in these local communities United Way is currently running a Workplace Giving Campaign across Australia. We have called this the One Day campaign and so far we have had a fantastic response from donors. To find out more go to [www.unitedway.org.au/oneday](http://www.unitedway.org.au/oneday) or contact us at [nsw@unitedway.com.au](mailto:nsw@unitedway.com.au)

Doug Taylor

CEO, United Way Australia

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## Keeping volunteering ahead of the waves of change

In my younger years I spent many a Saturday morning enjoying the beauty of Sydney's beaches and more importantly at that time of my life, the waves. Hours and hours were spent sitting out the back watching sets roll in, waiting for the right wave for a perfect ride. Getting that perfect ride totally depended on getting in the best position - too far in front and I would get dumped and too far behind and I would miss the wave and have to wait for the next set.

In life, every generation also experiences other kinds of waves. Waves of social change. And the last few decades have given rise to new social trends that have significant implications for volunteering in Australia. Trends like the increased rate of women re-entering the workforce after having children, the emergence of Corporate Social Responsibility, the rise of technology, increased levels of migration and the retirement of Baby Boomers. All of these developments present challenges to the volunteering movement in this country but as they say, every challenge presents an opportunity. That is of course as long as you are best placed to catch the wave and ride it, if not you run the risk of missing out or getting dumped!

To their credit, the Commonwealth Government has shown leadership in trying to address this through the development of a

National Volunteer Strategy. I have been privileged to be part of an advisory group set up to support the development of this strategy under the leadership of the Hon Tanya Plibersek, Minister for Social Inclusion and Human Services. This group has grappled with these social changes and acknowledged the need for the volunteer movement and sector to adapt and innovate to make the most of the opportunities they present. Step one in this process is a clear picture of what these changes mean for our work in the community. Key implications include the need for greater flexibility, emergence of technology as a gateway and mode of engagement for volunteering and the increasing professionalisation of volunteering where individuals want to use their business or personal skills to make a difference.

The greatest social innovators are simply people who create opportunities from social change by bringing together the right people and organisations to make things happen. I see a tremendous opportunity for employee volunteering where employers see volunteering as a talent retention and skills building strategy (especially for Gen Y) and employees can take part in highly engaging community activities without it impacting on their leisure time.

United Way has responded to this growing interest, in fact did you know that last year we managed over 200 corporate volunteering days across Australia with over 3,300 volunteers contributing 17,000+ hours (or 2,125+ days). That's a lot of people interested in giving back to their community. We are currently re-imagining our volunteering work and exploring how it can engage many more people, on different levels, using their personal and professional skills and also align with business objectives and our Community Impact strategy.

A number of our new strategies are already using these practices and showing enormous potential. For example the '90 Homes for 90 Lives' project which is a strategy to provide long term housing for the many rough sleepers in Woolloomooloo. A number of our corporate partners are actively involved in this work at a strategic level - Philip Coleman (COO at UBS) as Chair and Annette Bain (Head of the Freehills Foundation) as a member of the Executive Committee. These individuals are using their expertise and influence as well as skilled capabilities from their organisation. This is exciting work and taking us into new territory with new partners and communities and is critical if we are to deliver on our mission of improving lives by mobilising the caring power of communities.

Doug Taylor

CEO, United Way Australia

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## Victorian Bushfire update: 2 years on

It is now over 2 years since deadly bushfires swept through the southern state of Victoria, leaving 173 people dead and 500 injured. In addition, more than 2,000 homes were destroyed and experts estimated that the number of affected wildlife (killed or injured) could climb well into the millions.

In response to our appeal for donations to aid the recovery of the devastating impact of the Victorian bushfires, you generously provided us with money and volunteers to help rebuild the lives of those affected. With this funding support, United Way Australia was able to partner with The Salvation Army to appoint Bushfire Recovery Support Worker, Jo Ensor, to work on the ground for 12 months.

Jo has been working with the Salvation Army Healesville team, supporting the local communities around Healesville, Marysville, Yarra Glen and Steeles Creek since November 2009. Jo has been organising and supporting a wide range of community projects and groups - activities which are a way for the locals to come together, which support local businesses and which help Jo to identify who needs assistance. Where Jo hasn't been able to directly provide the help herself, she has proactively collaborated with other local community organisations - be that providing material aid, counselling, referrals, supporting and organising group activities and helping communities voice their concerns about local services.

Australians are proud people and Jo has found that whilst many are not prepared to ask for help for themselves, they are willing to seek help for their children. This insight has led Jo to focus on young people, organising child centred groups such as an art therapy program and a gingerbread house making activity at Christmas. In turn, these activities have allowed parents to gain peer support by talking to other affected bushfire victims in a non-confrontational and engaging environment - and as a result, they have been able to begin the healing and rebuilding process.

As well as donating money, United Way supporters have volunteered

their time to help. In working with United Way on corporate volunteering, Jo has found these events "create goodwill in the community and is thankful to all those that got involved."

In the wake of the second anniversary of Black Saturday (7 February) Jo and the Salvation Army team are now faced with filling the gap after the withdrawal of other emergency relief and case management support. The media spotlight has left affected Victorian communities but the reality of the struggle to rebuild daily lives goes on.

Jo is now finding victims who are coming to her through referrals from the groups she supports:

- People who are recognising they cannot rebuild due to restrictive building codes or regulations. Or if they can rebuild, there is not enough money to complete their house so they are going without hot water, curtains, carpets and more.
- Young people in Yarra Glen particularly, are facing homelessness because there is a shortage of homeless shelters in the area. To cope with the issue, these young people are being sent to the city which separates them from the community they know and leaves them feeling more isolated.
- The suicide rate in the Yarra Valley has increased which mainly affect men aged between 30 and 50 years who helped to fight the fires and rescue people and as a result of what they saw or due to the large losses they experienced, tragically felt they could not face life anymore.

To continue the invaluable work of Jo, The Salvation Army has funded her position for another 12 months. Great news!

Thank you to all of our donors and our corporate partners, donors and supporters who have supported the Victorian Bushfire Recovery Project. Your donations are making a real and lasting difference on the ground and have facilitated so many other opportunities for the bushfire affected communities.

Thank you also to Jo and The Salvation Army team at Healesville for bringing our donations to life.

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## National Volunteering Week 2011 - expressing hopes and dreams through art

On Friday 13 May United Way Australia, Weave and South Sydney High School came together to facilitate a strategic volunteering event for corporate partners as part of National Volunteering Week 2011.

For those of you that aren't familiar with it, National Volunteering Week is the largest celebration of volunteers and volunteerism in Australia, and provides an opportunity to highlight the role of volunteers in our communities and to say thank you to the more than 5 million Australians who volunteer.

On Friday, we were very fortunate that our Health Strategy community partner, Weave, could host the event in their new art space which showcased their inaugural art show 'Breakout' - featuring work created by people who have been marginalised by circumstance, disabilities or mental health issues.

The objective of the day was to update our corporate partners on our Community Impact strategy progress over breakfast and then facilitate an art activity that allowed corporate representatives to work with and inspire some South Sydney High School students who are at risk of disengaging from school before graduating. Something that could negatively affect the future opportunities and success of these young people in working life.

The theme of the activity was called 'hopes and dreams' - a project where corporate partners could share their own aspirations and experiences and provide encouragement and confidence for students looking toward their futures.

It was wonderful to see the imagination and creativity of the students being portrayed through canvas - very impressive and emotive work.

Our corporate partners shared their reflections of the day:

*"I was surprised by how mature the students were, already thinking about university and subject choices."*

*"I was impressed by supportive they were of each other. That's nice."*

*"Using art to express yourself in a non threatening environment is a*

*great way to relate to other people and share each other's stories."*

*"It might be weeks or months after today but the train has been set in motion, through these interactions. These are the most important things, the thoughts that gradually tick over in the students' heads. Today the seeds have been set."*

For those of you interested in seeing the art show, 'Breakout' is open until 17 June, 10am - 4pm, Tuesday to Friday.

We'd like to thank our corporate partners that came along to the day and participated and we look forward to exploring more strategic volunteering opportunities with our partners in the near future.

To view the photos from the day visit  
[unitedwaysydney.phanfare.com/5119701](http://unitedwaysydney.phanfare.com/5119701)

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## 5 cents for 5 senses - a little goes a long way

United Way WA launched a fundraising campaign in April 2011 called '5 cents for 5 senses' to raise money for children suffering the loss of one or more of their senses.

The '5 cents for 5 senses' campaign called on people across Western Australia to scour their homes, workplaces and vehicles for 'unwanted' 5 cent coins that are gathering dust and could be put to better use.

The campaign received some great local media coverage, with articles in The West and The West Weekend and air time on Sunshine FM radio.

United Way WA Chief Executive Officer Sue Dixon said the five cent piece, which people often put to one side at home, in the office or in the family car, is largely redundant and would be better off helping someone in need.

"This is a great way to generate much-needed funding for the benefit of five senses-related charities - Telethon Speech and Hearing Centre, Senses Foundation, WA Deaf Society, Assistance Dogs Australia, and Friends of Autism," said Mrs Dixon.

"I did a random search of my home the other day and found 18 five cent coins. If through this campaign we're able to collect coins from

just a fraction of the population, it will make a real difference in the lives of those less fortunate."

As the campaign draws to a close, United Way WA are thrilled to announce that over \$9000 was raised and would like to thank everyone who donated and acknowledge the terrific efforts and support of the organisations that made it happen - community partners, The West media and Sonshine FM, HBF and Westpac, Linc Integrated, Print Logic and communications and United Way staff.

Whilst Westpac and HBF are no longer accepting donations, people can still donate their 5c coins by contacting United Way WA directly - [www.unitedwaywa.com.au](http://www.unitedwaywa.com.au)

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## Kick starting strategic engagement volunteering opportunities

On 22 March 2011 we held our first 'Lunch with the Girls' event in partnership with the Beacon Foundation, our Income Coalition community partner.

Many young women are at risk of disengaging from school, lack motivation and confidence or do not have a significant female role model in their lives. Lunch with the Girls is a one day program aimed at 15-16 year old female students and is designed specifically to inspire young women to reach their full potential. The program encourages self-help in young women before they leave school to develop the skills and confidence needed to achieve personal success for themselves and their community.

The programs key focus areas for student self-development are:

- self awareness
- motivation
- personal responsibility
- positive psychology
- goal setting
- emotional intelligence

We had 4 representatives from corporate partners ING Australia and Fuji Xerox Australia and United Way Sydney come along and spend time mentoring year 10 girls from Plumpton High School - a high needs school identified in Western Sydney.

The day was a great success and we received very positive feedback from the school and the girls.

*"I wanted to thank the mentors and United Way so much for your hard work yesterday with our year 10 girls. I know that they gained confidence and better self awareness. Lunch with the Girls is such a wonderful concept and I hope that we can continue to run the program in future years."* Hayley Tanti, Science Teacher and Program Coordinator, Plumpton High School.

*"I had a great day and you have really changed how I see myself. I am going to try really hard to get my dream job. You are amazing and have inspired me to do better in life and try and achieve my goals. Thank you for today and for showing me that I can do anything that I set my mind to!"* Plumpton High School student.

*"Thank you for this huge opportunity today and for giving me a bigger path to my future. I'm really glad I met you, you have made a big difference to my life and I will never forget it."* Plumpton High School student.

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## Commonwealth Bank Playgroups in the Park - the spirit of volunteering

In April United Way Australia took a team of volunteers from Commonwealth Bank to Redfern to run the Playgroups in the Park. And the volunteers rose to the challenge and did a fantastic job.

United Way has been working with South Sydney Community Aid and Connect Redfern to support Playgroups in the Park, a community bbq event held three times a year at Redfern. Community support has been getting bigger each time and if the weather is good, over 800 people can turn up for a BBQ lunch. The barbeques are one way for our community partners to connect with hard to reach local families who may not be accessing much needed childcare services.

These Corporate Connect volunteering activities also allow employees time out from everyday work to meet colleagues they may have not crossed paths with otherwise and team build. Many of the Commonwealth Bank volunteers had not met each other until they arrived at the Corporate Connect.

After spending the day helping the Redfern community, Kally Lourantos from the credit card team had a message to share her

colleagues at the bank. *"You should definitely consider volunteering. Give it a go, even if it is just once or twice a year. Volunteering is very rewarding and the more of us that get involved the better. It's a great chance to meet others from across the Commonwealth Bank and it feels good that we can make a difference. The smiles on the kids and parents faces were very rewarding."*

Kally's feedback was reinforced by all the volunteers who reported they too would recommend a United Way Corporate Connect to their colleagues.

*"Commonwealth Bank makes it easy for us to volunteer and as long as you plan your volunteering time around work priorities, then getting management approval isn't a problem."*

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## Spreading the word - being a community advocate

United Way asks our supporters to make a difference in 3 key ways - Give, Advocate, Volunteer. But often there is confusion around what we mean by advocate.

Being an advocate means spreading the word - raising awareness of United Way's Community Impact approach and the lasting ways in which communities and individuals benefit. The role of advocacy is flexible - you can choose your level of involvement and engagement, you can take part no matter what your skill level or experience is and you can choose the medium that best suits you i.e. online, face to face or print.

Some examples of being a community advocate:

- Someone who encourages colleagues to take part in Workplace Giving donations, Corporate Connect volunteering or fundraising events
- Someone who knows government officials or has media contacts who can raise the importance of our Community Impact work
- Someone who follows us through social media and shares our stories and the key issues with others

To provide you with first-hand stories of what it is like to be a community advocate, we'd like to share the success of one of our

corporate partners, Fuji Xerox Australia (FXA). Over the past 2 years FXA has established a dedicated, national network of 13 community advocates who each work in their local areas to promote community engagement. We interviewed a few of them to learn more about their role and their learnings:

1. What is the role of a community champion and why is it important to have a network of champions in an organisation?

**Nick Chin:** The role of the community champion is to liaise between community partners and our employees on site when organising activities and programs. The community champion is the knowledge expert on site, able to communicate community objectives and activities to employees in the organisation.

**Clara Di Lizio and Esther Roper:** It is also vital that there is a singular touch point for employees within a business to go to - someone who is willing to assist each and every time.

2. Give examples of activities you help coordinate as part of your role

**Clara Di Lizio and Esther Roper:** We coordinate a lot of community initiatives locally such as charity fundraising events like fun runs, trivia nights and morning teas, education programs like school mentoring, reading and career choice days, community awareness week, Christmas appeals and Corporate Connect volunteering days.

3. How do you advocate participation in community activities?

**Nick Chin:** Buy in from the management community and team leaders is the first crucial step. These people are in a great position to leverage their relationships with their teams and communicate our community values. And it is important to maintain a local feel. A localised community champion is better able to respond to the needs of the site's employees - more swiftly and effectively than a centralised coordinator. They have a better understanding of the site culture and dynamics.

**Clara Di Lizio and Esther Roper:** The vital ingredient to ensure participation for community activities is consistency of communication. In our experience, in order for employees to feel engaged they need to see that organisation isn't doing once off charitable events to "just to tick the box." We use a number of mediums and forums - monthly newsletters, emails, marketing collateral, events and staff meetings. Anytime you have an opportunity...

4. What is the most rewarding aspect of being a champion and what does it give you as an individual? Both personally and professionally.

**Nick Chin:** Personally, being a community advocate has helped me give something back to the community. We are all becoming increasingly time poor and I do not have the opportunity to participate in community activities to the level I would like to outside of work. Professionally, the program has given me visibility across the business. I have forged good working relationships with managers and team members and have been able to use these relationships in other work related projects.

**Clara Di Lizio and Esther Roper:** Personally, the role is self rewarding, it means we can give back to those less fortunate and we actually see the positive impact that can be made on people's lives. Professionally we are proud to work for an organisation that allows us to take time out to dedicate to community work. The advocacy role also allows us to meet more employees across the business that we wouldn't normally cross paths with and gives us greater access to senior management when discussing the business' community strategy.

5. What is the most challenging aspect of being a champion and how do you overcome these challenges?

**Nick Chin:** Two way communications are challenging - you have to be quite persistent to receive feedback sometimes. Ensuring that communications are direct and the call to action is clear and simple, is a sure way to overcome this as well as making sure that management is involved in decision making and fully endorses your activities.

**Clara Di Lizio and Esther Roper:** Sometimes it can be difficult to get employee involvement, especially during busy parts of the year. Friendly reminders and clear information before the event helps. Ensuring that we do the right types of activities at the right times is not always easy and sometimes our company strategy doesn't always align with employee's passion for a particular cause charity so we look for balance and do proper planning ahead of time. Management involvement is also vital - having them walk the talk and lead by example is essential to ensuring a shift in participation.

6. What advice would you give to someone who was interested in starting out as a champion? Would you recommend the role?

**Nick Chin:** I would recommend the role to anyone. It is helpful in

developing relationships, creating a profile and most importantly contributing to community activities. Be prepared however, to have a thick skin - unfortunately not everyone shares the same perspective as you do!

Clara Di Lizio and Esther Roper: Yes we would recommend the role absolutely. Our advice would be to not wish you would have done it when you see other champions. Just do it!! Give it everything you have and open your heart and soul to the experience - it will reward you tenfold.

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