

Few in the Mercy world would know more about volunteers than Julie Reid, who for more than 16 years has been Volunteer Coordinator at Mercy Hospice Auckland. She talks here about her role in overseeing more than 500 currently engaged in supporting the hospice and its work.

## Volunteers play key role at Mercy Hospice

WHEN Julie Reid began as Volunteer Coordinator at Mercy Hospice Auckland, there were under 100 involved. "Then they just started to come, and they haven't stopped. The total hovers around 550. I never have to go recruiting. People come looking, on a daily basis."

For the year ending last March, total hours provided by volunteers was around 48,500. At an estimated rate of \$20 an hour, that's just under \$1 million worth of volunteering contributed to the hospice, which each year has to raise 60% of its operating costs.

What attracts volunteers? For most, says Julie, it's personal experience. A relative or a friend has spent time as a patient at the hospice. Volunteers have often recently retired, and want to spend a portion of their time doing something for others. "The volunteer role becomes a part of their lives.

"But they are people at all levels, from youngsters who need to do community service for their Duke of Edinburgh Award. So our youngest volunteer is around 14 or 15. Most will work in one of our retail shops, each of which will need 30 or 40 volunteers.

"A number of those over 25 who are working fulltime have a social conscience and want to do something with their spare time. The average age of our volunteers is probably around 50 or so."

Volunteers are engaged in a wide range of activities. There is a roster of those who work in the inpatient unit; the roster is nearly always full, with few vacancies. The day programme which runs twice a week involves volunteers, a large number of them providing transport. Volunteers work with Life Stories, helping to record people's memories; some are involved in fund-raising, in aromatherapy and flower arranging, in the communion roster.

Not all have close involvement with patients. "But I think every volunteer contributes to patient well-being, no matter where they are working," says Julie. And all of them receive training before they begin their role.

"There are two levels of training provided. The first is when they come to the hospice. It's called an interview, but I do most of the talking. I tell the Mercy story, from Catherine McAuley and the sisters coming to New Zealand, through to the hospice, its function and their involvement with that.

"The second level consists in the training we run twice a year – a once-a-week session for six weeks. It's quite intensive and sees all the key members of the hospice speaking about their roles. "Depending on where they're working, volunteers will be precepted by another volunteer or maybe a staff member, who will train them in the specifics of their role."

Julie likes to think that volunteers are thanked continually for the tasks they perform. "They are very much appreciated. We have an annual Christmas afternoon tea, a long-service awards celebration on Foundation Day, 12 Dec, when both staff and volunteers are recognised for their years of service. We remember their birthday, and acknowledge personal things like a bereavement or a bout of ill health.

"Generally volunteers don't ask for recognition. Most tell me they get more than they give. The volunteer role is important, because it brings the community to us, with its cultural diversity and its many different voices. It's a good check for Mercy Hospice, to make sure we're doing all we can for patients and their families.

Volunteers walk the talk of Catherine McAuley's mission and values, says Julie. "She was really an early volunteer, and today's volunteers mirror what her vision brought to people of her day, especially to those facing illness and death."

At Mercy Hospice, the whole organisation appreciates what volunteers do, says Julie. "I think our managers have been very wise to place volunteers so closely within our organisation. We look after them, by providing them with supervision and training if they need it. We have a history here of ensuring that the volunteer base is well looked after. The good results flow from this.

"I've been to Baggot Street and I know Catherine's story well. Her own father modelled concern for others, through volunteering his time," says Julie. "We're very fortunate here at Mercy, because of the responses which people make to the opportunities we're able to provide. We never say that someone is 'just a volunteer', because without them, we would miss out on so much."



VOLUNTEER coordinator Julie Reid...  
'they've just never stopped coming.'