'Lots of little kindnesses': valuing the role of older Australians as informal volunteers in the community

JENI WARBURTON* and DEIRDRE MCLAUGHLIN*

ABSTRACT

This paper describes the ways in which older people contribute to their communities and families as informal volunteers. It challenges current ways of thinking that assign an economic value to the productive activities undertaken by older people. Using qualitative data from a study of older people resident in Queensland, Australia, the paper explores the ways that older people contribute to their families and to the community and the outcomes associated with these activities. Two specific themes emerged from the data: first, the ways in which older people contribute to strong inter-generational relations, and second, how they provide essential mutual support that permits many older people to remain living in the community. These contributions, while often small in themselves, are in aggregate critical both to family functioning and to the maintenance of sustainable and healthy communities. Many are reciprocal interactions that add value to the lives of individuals and offer positive social roles in later life, and they may be particularly important for those from minority cultural backgrounds or at risk of social isolation. The findings suggest that older people are integral to community and civil society and, therefore, that social policy should respond to the ageing of Australia's population and recognise the positive contributions of older people, rather than emphasising the costs of demographic change.

KEY WORDS – older volunteers, community, social capital, inter-generational relations, productive ageing.

Introduction

Over the last decade, several studies have sought to estimate the economic value of volunteer and social capital activities, and very recently there have also been attempts to put a monetary value on the contributions made by older people to society outside the labour market. These endeavours are a direct response to the demographic challenges currently facing Australia, which have led to concerns that population ageing will have important

* Australasian Centre on Ageing, University of Queensland, Australia.

social and economic implications for future generations (Australian Government Treasury 2002–03, 2004). While these studies have been useful in certain respects, valuing older people's contributions in money terms tends to neglect the social dimensions of volunteering and social capital. If we wish to adopt a more positive approach to population ageing, then we need to focus on the value-adding aspects of community involvement.

This paper explores the concept of 'informal volunteering' and the ways in which older people contribute to society as informal volunteers. Informal volunteering can be defined as the myriad ways that people contribute to their families, friends, neighbourhood and the community (Wilson and Musick 1997). This aspect of volunteering, although an important component of social capital generation, has been neglected in the literature (Baldock 1998). The paper reports a qualitative study of older people's experiences of community involvement to demonstrate that these activities, while outside the economic realm, are nevertheless very important to the wellbeing of society. We begin with a critique of the research literature on current ways of valuing both volunteers and older people.

Valuing older people

In Australia, as in other western countries, volunteering is increasingly recognised as a productive activity that can be valued economically. This has prompted a proliferation of studies that estimate the economic worth of formal volunteering through non-profit organisations (*e.g.* Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2000; Ironmonger 2000). Such studies have recently been extended to include caring activities and have demonstrated that both volunteering and caring are valuable to the economy. They have also served to make these activities more visible (Soupourmas and Ironmonger 2002).

As concerns grow about the costs associated with an ageing population, more attention has been given to the economic value of the caring and volunteer activities of older people (*e.g.* de Vaus, Gray and Stanton 2003; Ranzijn, Harford and Andrews 2002). Ageing populations are construed as a problem because of the economic pressures associated with declining labour market participation, and social concerns about inter-generational equity (Australian Government Treasury 2002–03, 2004). These studies challenge the notion that activities outside the labour market, and particularly those performed by older people, are not economically valuable, and thus help to counter the negativity associated with population ageing.

There are, however, several limitations of these studies, most generally that they invariably focus on what can easily be quantified and counted. The value of volunteering is measured in terms of output benefits and transferable replacement costs, but neglect other important benefits of volunteering that are harder to measure (Ironmonger 2000). As vividly described by Richard Titmuss (1970) in *The Gift Relationship: From Human Blood to Social Policy*, they concern the benefits to society of people's contributions to strangers. This dimension of volunteer activity far outweighs the replacement costs of delivering services. The value of such activities is beginning to be recognised in contemporary debates about 'social capital', since Putnam (1993) alerted us to the importance of dense networks of civic engagement and their capacity to produce elements such as trust, reciprocity and co-operation. The contribution of these activities to civil society, to the accumulation of social capital and to democracy is increasingly recognised in Australia (Baum *et al.* 1999; Wilkinson and Bittman 2002).

It is however increasingly evident that contemporary governments are taking an interest in social capital accumulation because of the associated economic benefits (Productivity Commission 2003). High levels of social capital are associated with reduced service costs, improved population health and lower crime rates (Wilkinson and Bittman 2002). These associations have led to a new wave of economic evaluations of the multiplier effects associated with social cohesiveness (*e.g.* Knack and Keefer 1997; Mayer 2003). In this way, social capital debates are tending to move towards the economic dimension and towards benefits for governments. Yet citizens also benefit from societies rich in social capital, as volunteering at the heart of social capital helps create a cohesive and stable society, adds value to services and quality to individual lives (Ironmonger 2000). Social participation is far more than a set of strategies for reducing government services and balancing the budget.

In addition to these general arguments, many specific problems attach to the economic valuation of the volunteer and caring activities of older people – another manifestation of the rising interest in 'productive ageing' (Morrow-Howell, Hinterlong and Sherraden 2001). Critics of this concept have expressed concerns that it leads to a narrow focus on economics and an over-emphasis on activities that can relatively easily be given an economic value. The term productive is classically associated with economics, yet many older people are not productive in the sense of producing goods and services which can be traded for money; some have therefore suggested that there are dangers associated with the use of such an economic concept applied to a life stage (Ranzijn, Harford and Andrews 2002). One specific concern of an over-emphasis on production and productivity is

that it may pressure older adults to contribute to the economy. Hence, for example, recent policy attention in Australia has moved towards retaining older people in paid work. At its extreme, it may lead to a reduced choice of activities, and even the coercion of older people to remain in paid work rather than supporting them in other productive activities (Hinterlong, Morrow-Howell and Sherraden 2001). This narrow approach can then lead, paradoxically, to a neglect of other socially valuable roles performed by older people (Freedman 1997; Burr, Caro and Moorhead 2002). Unless we explore the social as well as economic benefits of various productive activities, the importance of these roles may be ignored – including the contribution that older people make to sustainable and healthy communities.

Methodology

The aim of the research reported in this paper was to identify the contributions made to the community by older people as informal volunteers: what older people do to help their families and the community, their experience as volunteers, and how these activities contribute to society. To explore these issues from the perspective of older people, focus groups were chosen as an appropriate research method (van Manen 1990; Krueger 1994). The participants were 184 community-dwelling residents aged from 55 to 93 years, with 90 per cent aged at least 65 years, the customary retirement age in Australia. Participants were recruited through a local person, who was asked to ensure that a diverse representation of the area's older people attended, not only prominent members of the community.

Each focus group was guided by a common set of prepared questions that explored themes that were identified from three pilot group discussions. The themes related to what sorts of activities older people undertook with their families and in their communities, their motivations, whether they felt that their actions were valued, what barriers were confronted in the performance of these tasks, and the problems or differences arising from their cultural or geographical identity. This technique has been successfully used with older people in previous studies and is effective in developing a cross-cultural perspective (Quine 1999). In total, 26 focus groups were conducted, and each ran for between one and two hours. The group size ranged from four to 13 participants, and all proceedings were tape-recorded and the text transcribed.[1] Fourteen of the groups comprised both men and women; four groups comprised solely men, and eight solely women (Table 1).

TABLE 1. *Composition of the focus groups*

Number	Geographical area	Males	Females	Cultural backgrounds
1	City	1	6	England
2	City	4	4	Germany
3	City		8	Holland, Ireland, Wales
4	City	4	2	Greece, Hungary, Italy
5	City	3	2	Vietnam
6	City	6		
7	City	5		
8	City	7		
9	City	1	5	Indigenous group
10	City hinterland	2	6	England, Philippines
11	City hinterland		13	Italy
12	City hinterland		5	
13	City hinterland	2	6	Holland
14	City hinterland	3	4	
15	City hinterland		10	
16	City hinterland	5		
17	Regional city	4	4	Italy
18	Regional city	3	4	Indigenous group
19	Regional city	3	6	
20	Regional city		3	
21	Regional city		4	Indigenous group
22	Regional city	2	6	
23	Regional city		4	
24	Remote		7	
25	Remote	4	8	
26	Remote	3	5	Indigenous group

A sampling frame was drawn up to ensure representation across the different geographical localities across the state, as well as those from different cultural backgrounds (Table 1). In this paper, the groups are numbered by location, and the respondents from different cultural backgrounds, including Indigenous Australians, are identified. To ensure a good geographical spread, groups were held in the populous south east of Queensland around Brisbane, the capital, where 46 per cent of the State's population live (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2001). Nine groups (1–9) were held in different and socio-economically diverse Brisbane suburbs, and seven groups (10–16) in its hinterland. There were also seven groups in two regional cities (17–23), and three (24–26) in more remote country areas to the north and west of Brisbane.

A mix of participants from different ethnic backgrounds was also sought so as to represent the diversity of the Australian population. One-third (32%) of Australia's older people were born overseas (ABS 1999). To represent the diversity, individuals from Greece, Italy, Hungary, Holland, Philippines, Vietnam and the UK were included. Two groups [4, 5] that

specifically represented migrant groups were held in Brisbane, and individual participants from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds also attended groups in other locations. In addition, four groups [9, 18, 21 and 26] comprised exclusively Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, and represented the Indigenous Australian population.

Findings

The majority of respondents to this study were well aware of societal concerns about the economic and social costs associated with demographic ageing (Australian Government Treasury 2002–03). Several respondents suggested that older people were seen as an economic liability on future generations, highlighting the dominance of an economic worldview. By contrast, they suggested that their social contribution was often devalued and taken for granted. This particularly applied to their informal volunteer activities, which the respondents in one group [4] said was 'just community spirit' or 'just something you do and you don't think of it as volunteering or anything' [CALD participant, group 13].

The group discussions suggested that older people made many, diverse contributions to society as informal volunteers, and that these activities were important to social functioning. Many respondents actively resisted the negative discourses associated with ageing, and suggested that older people were instead very valuable to society. Some even suggested that older people were at the core of healthy and active communities. As one respondent in Group 15 said:

Older people are the basis of any community. They are the ones who give, give, give. I do feel that they are undervalued by government and I believe it's past the time when government should be stepping forward and saying 'hey, how can we help you?' not 'how can *we* help *them*'. I also think we've done a lot to debunk the myth that older people are a drain upon community because we are not, with a few notable exceptions! No, we do a good job and we need to all give ourselves a pat on the back because we have learnt throughout our lives.

Another respondent in Group 25 summed up the views of many when saying, 'I really think that there are a lot of unsung heroes probably in the world, there's a lot of little kindnesses being done that nobody ever hears about'. This paper focuses on these 'little kindnesses', and illustrates how informal volunteering is essential to the functioning of a healthy society. Overall, the group discussions revealed that older people contributed to their families and to their communities in various ways that were rarely acknowledged. Yet these activities are important to individual and community wellbeing, and challenge the notion that older people do not

contribute because they are outside the economic framework of paid work. Exploring the ways that older people contribute as informal volunteers in the community helps us understand the breadth and diversity of these activities. The respondents helped their children and grandchildren in their homes with childcare, maintenance, caring, financial and emotional support, or helped them with their businesses. Some of these activities were routine, some at times of crisis. Others cared for parents, partners or siblings. Many older people provided essential support for families. Older people also provided much general community giving, beyond formal volunteering. Many helped young people in the community; others supported older friends and neighbours in myriad ways, with some of the activities being reciprocated.

Here we focus on two major themes that emerged from the data. The first is the relationship between old and young, and specifically how older people contribute to good inter-generational relations. The second is the ways in which older people help other older people, and the contribution of this help in enabling people to remain living in the community.

Better inter-generational relations

Improving inter-generational relationships has been described as 'a cost-effective strategy for helping meet important community needs, redefining the role of elders in society and strengthening the social compact' (Henkin and Kingston 1999: 105). Many older people in the present study high-lighted the special relationship that they felt they had with the young. This was something they attributed to the ageing process, described by one person as the way in which he had 'mellowed out' over the lifecourse. In particular, several respondents suggested that older people could be a supportive and steadying influence on young people. As one participant said: 'You're more tolerant I think with your grandchildren than you were with your own' [Group 25].

The data showed how strong inter-generational relations were built through all the informal volunteer roles that older people had with the young. In particular, the relationship with grandchildren was often very strong, and many respondents highlighted the mutual benefits of such a relationship. For example, a respondent in Group 24 said:

I think we find this with our grandchildren, as they get older. We've looked after them, we've taken them to school, picked them up, given them tuck-shop money and all this sort of thing, but when they get older you know, oh grandma, do you need something done? Grandma, the windows need cleaning. Yes, we'll do it for you.

This relationship provided a key role and identity for many participants in the study. Several participants suggested that this role was particularly important in cases of special need, such as when a child with disabilities was born in the family, or for children with behavioural problems.

While there was often a strong relationship between grandparents and grandchildren, several respondents also spoke of the special relationship they had with unrelated young people. Participants spoke of the time they spent with neighbours' children, some even described this relationship as being like a surrogate grandparent. The importance of this relationship has been recognised in local schemes designed to build on the strong links between the old and the young. As one example, the *Generation Chat* programme supported by some Queensland local councils links older people with young school children. In other cases, childcare centres or youth clubs were located near facilities for older people, and close contact was established. One woman in Group 1 discussed the mutual benefits of such interaction:

We have a young volunteer who takes computer lessons, to give him better social skills to be able to go and do a job, and communication skills. M (an older woman) is one of his students, so while she's doing something for herself, she's also volunteering, doing the social interaction with him that's really important.

The respondents generally attributed this special relationship to two factors. In Group 15 it was said that older people were the ones who had 'got the time to listen'. The concept of having time was raised by many respondents, and often contrasted with the busy lives of others, particularly parents. Warburton and Crosier (2001) associated 'having time' with involvement in formal volunteer work. Second, respondents commented that they had gained knowledge and experience through life that they felt that they could pass on. As one person in Group 13 suggested. 'I think the more we can impart to the up-and-coming younger generation particularly, the better society is going to be in the future. You've got to have good foundations'.

The value of passing on knowledge and wisdom was mentioned particularly by some of the culturally and linguistically diverse participants. One CALD participant in Group 4 described herself as being 'the fountain of information' for younger generations. She related that she was consulted about ceremonies such as weddings and christenings. Passing down cultural knowledge may be an important role for many ethnic older people, particularly as grandparents (*e.g.* Armstrong 2003; Treas and Mazumdar 2004). Several Indigenous participants in this study

expressed such views. As one in Group 21 suggested, older people have a critical role in transmitting cultural knowledge that is 'handed down from generation to generation with our mob'. For many Indigenous people, young people living in urban areas were more likely to be alienated from their culture and to have less access to elders than those who lived in rural or regional areas. Although little, if any, research has been published in the Australian context, studies conducted within Native American communities in the United States highlight the greater difficulties encountered in inter-generational cultural transmissions in a metropolitan or urban environment (Bahr 1994; Wiscott and Kopera-Frye 2000).

Indigenous respondents described the particular role that older people had in passing on cultural traditions to the young, as with taking them out in 'the bush', and teaching them 'the old ways', and many also mentioned, as one Indigenous participant put it, 'putting troubled kids back on the right track'. Several described their protection and support of troubled young people, *e.g.* making sure that they got home safely at night, or supporting them through school and the legal system. Several talked about facing young people in court in order to deter them from further crime, or visiting them in prison to encourage and support them. This responsibility extended beyond family members to all young Indigenous people in the area, consistent with the broad concept of family in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures (Hartley 1995). While these expressions reflected the special relationship between the old and the young in Indigenous families, the context surrounding this relationship is highly complex as a result of the difficult social conditions facing Indigenous people in Australia (Bourke, Bourke and Edwards 1998). As one Indigenous woman suggested, some elders were 'over-worked' by the many social problems in these communities, including poor health, alcoholism and high rates of crime.

It was not only the Indigenous participants that had challenging family and community roles, for others described the complexity of family relationships. For example, one respondent related that he and his wife were rearing three grandchildren because his daughter was incapable of doing so. One Vietnamese respondent also spoke of the cultural expectations that he and his elderly wife '*have* to look after the kids because their father and mother go to work'. This reference to the negative implications of caring responsibilities is consistent with other evidence that contemporary grandparenthood may lead to excessive demands. These arise variously from both parents working, the increasing number of blended families and single-parent families, and the small but growing number of parents rendered dysfunctional by drug or alcohol

problems (Jendrek 1994; Davidhizar, Bechtel and Woodring 2000; Wheelock and Jones 2002; Fitzpatrick 2003; Reynolds, Wright and Beale 2003).

Nevertheless, the majority of the focus group participants and interviewees described positive relationships with their grandchildren and indeed with other young people. Many of their expressions described positive, reciprocal arrangements of mutual benefit, which suggests that older people have an important role with the young, and are actively contributing towards both strong, inter-generational relationships and individuals' successful personal development. These activities may satisfy a deeper human need for generativity, in other words, for a person to pass on to the next generation what she or he has learnt in life (Erikson, Erikson and Kivnick 1986). This approach to human development suggests that, contrary to a common misconception, older people desire to contribute to the future (Ranzijn 2001). The contribution cannot be easily quantified, as investment in the young is surely investment in the future, and it is almost impossible to place an economic value on the long-term benefits associated with strong and positive inter-generational relations. But clearly the benefits cannot simply be reduced to the labour costs of childcare.

Helping other older people

The participants' comments also highlighted the many informal volunteer acts that older people do for each other, and the importance of these activities for community life. The amount of help given to elderly friends and neighbours was considerable, and included putting out rubbish bins, collecting mail, paying bills, helping in times of ill health or crisis, talking, providing friendship, shopping, taking out people with mobility problems, phoning each other, and keeping an eye on the house. These activities not only improve the lives of many older people living in the community, they also help many older people to remain living at home. These are important sources of support, given the trend over the past 20 years in Australia away from institutional care and the growth in the number of older people living in the community (Gibson 1998; ABS 1999).

Many respondents highlighted the routine nature of these 'little kindnesses' and that they were simply part of community living. One in Group 10 said:

I have a friend around the corner, if she goes and visits her family, well, I'll go and pick up her mail or put her garbage bin out and just, you know, little things, and the same, I know that she'd do the same for me.

Many noted, as did this respondent, that this form of community giving was often reciprocated. In themselves, these activities may appear to be slight, but in aggregate they may make the difference between community living and institutional care, as a respondent in Group 2 observed:

Well, recently one of my neighbours had a heart attack, well naturally I didn't ask him. I hopped in and did his gardening and mowed his lawn and did everything I possibly could for him. … I mowed my lawn today, so why not mow my neighbour's yard, which I'm sure he would have appreciated it.

Many people, particularly those that live alone, simply could not remain living in their own homes without the informal volunteer 'kindnesses' that occur routinely amongst many older people. It has been estimated that over a quarter of the older Australian population are women who live alone, and the share is growing (ABS 1999). Providing support and friendship by definition reduces social isolation, which has been identified as a critical problem facing many older people in the community (Findlay 2003). The practical importance of the prevention of social isolation was described by a respondent from Group 23:

I go shopping with B every Friday after pension – she has to use a wheelchair. Well, this same lady, she rings me every afternoon, round about four o'clock. She rings to make sure I'm alright; I mean she's got more problems that I have but she rings me to make sure I'm alright … and if she's a bit late at ringing me, I'll ring her to see if she's alright.

Mutual support and friendship can enable people to remain living in the community, and contribute to greater self-esteem and less loneliness and depression in both parties (Rook and Sorkin 2003). As one respondent suggested, 'you can understand what they're going through and I think support is a very important part of growing old' [Group 3]. Thus, the reciprocal aspect of informal volunteering is often based on the concept of shared experience. A Greek respondent in Group 4 suggested that older people who came from Greece offered particular support to those who had left their birth countries, because others 'haven't known that home sickness'. Shared experience may also extend to traumatic life events, such as major illness or widowhood. As a woman in Group 1 said, 'Last year, I helped a lady whose husband was in hospital when my husband was in hospital … and [still] helping … we're basically helping each other through their deaths'. In these ways, informal volunteering validates personal experience and provides older people with important social roles (Greenfield and Marks 2004; Warburton and McLaughlin in press).

Conclusions

This paper has described the breadth and diversity of contributions made by many older people to society as informal volunteers. The aim of the study was to explore these activities in depth and to understand them from the perspective of older people. The findings clearly demonstrate that older people are important generators of social capital, and play critical roles in maintaining strong communities and effective family functioning. These activities have often been neglected among the processes of adjustment to the losses of old age, particularly as the dominant gerontological discourses have tended to focus on older people's economic dependency, lack of roles and poor health (Arber and Evandrou 1993; Opie 1995). The positive contributions of older people have also been neglected in influential Australian policy documents (*e.g.* Australian Government Treasury 2002–3, 2004). The evidence presented in this paper challenges these negative perceptions, and suggests that older people, rather than typically being frail and dependent, are instead at the core of community.

In this paper, we have focused on informal volunteering among and by older people. As the title of the paper suggests, this generally comprises diverse 'little kindnesses', which, while individually quite small gestures, collectively are important to both communities and to families. It has been shown that inter-generational relations are strengthened by the many positive relationships older people have with the young, and that the daily help and support exchanged among older people helps them to remain living in the community, to be socially connected, and to avoid social isolation and loneliness. These outcomes cannot be easily quantified or measured, and simply valuing them in 'labour cost' terms would severely understate their value.

These activities have clear benefits to communities, but it is apparent that volunteering adds value to the lives of the volunteers (Wheeler, Gorey and Greenblatt 1998; Bradley 2000; Onyx and Warburton 2003). As the evidence presented in this paper demonstrates, many informal volunteer activities are reciprocal interactions that are embedded in family and community relationships. They provide benefits to both the giver and the receiver. For individuals, informal volunteering has the potential to offer positive social roles in later life (Siebert, Mutran and Reitzes 1999; Warburton and McLaughlin in press). This was particularly evident amongst the Indigenous participants in the study, who saw that they had an important role with the young in their communities. Other respondents spoke about their roles as grandparent, friend or neighbour. Having a positive role identity is important in later life, as it is throughout life, and

has been strongly correlated with improved health outcomes (Greenfield and Marks 2004).

Thus, the contribution made by older people as informal volunteers should be recognised in practice, policy and research. The concept of productive ageing needs to be broadened to include the many family and community activities of older people, and further research is urgently needed to explore their specific social capital contributions. While the present study's findings from Queensland cannot be generalised to the whole of Australia, the in-depth understanding generated by this study enlarges our awareness of the positive outcomes associated with all forms of volunteering. Overall, the findings turn our attention to the positive gains associated with ageing rather than the costs, and to the potential and capacities of older people rather than their limitations (*e.g.* Ranzijn 2002; Healy 2004; Kendig 2004).

Acknowledgements

NOTE

1 The data were analysed using the QSR-NVIVO analysis program. Thematic analyses of the text were conducted with cross-checking to ensure inter-rater reliability (Rubin and Babbie 1993). Iterative processes ensured rigour in both data collection and analysis (Krefting 1991).

References

Arber, S. and Evandrou, M. (eds) 1993. *Ageing, Independence and the Lifecourse.* Jessica Kingsley, London.
Armstrong, M. J. 2003. Is being a grandmother being old? Cross-ethnic perspectives from New Zealand. *Journal of Cross Cultural Gerontology*, **18**, 185–202.
Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 1999. *Older People, Australia: A Social Report.* Publication 4109.0, ABS, Canberra.
ABS 2000. *Unpaid Work and the Australian Economy 1997.* Publication 4441.0, ABS, Canberra.
ABS 2001. *Queensland Year Book.* Publication 1301.3, ABS, Canberra.
ABS 2004. *Australian Social Trends.* Publication 4102.0, ABS, Canberra.
Australian Government Treasury 2002–3. *The Intergenerational Report.* Budget Paper 5, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra.

Australian Government Treasury 2004. *Australia's Demographic Challenges*. Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra.

Baldock, C. 1998. Feminist discourses of unwaged work: the case of volunteerism. *Australian Feminist Studies*, **13**, 27, 19–34.

Bahr, K. S. 1994. The strengths of Apache grandmothers: observations on commitment, culture and caretaking. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, **24**, 2, 233–44.

Baum, F., Modra, C., Bush, R., Cox, E., Cooke, R. and Potter, R. 1999. Volunteering and social capital: an Adelaide study. *Australian Journal on Volunteering*, **4**, 1, 13–22.

Bourke, C., Bourke, E. and Edwards, B. 1998. *Aboriginal Australia: An Introductory Reader in Aboriginal Studies*. University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, Queensland.

Bradley, D. B. 2000. A reason to rise each morning: the meaning of volunteering in the lives of older adults. *Generations*, **23**, 4, 45–50.

Burr, J. A., Caro, F. G. and Moorhead, J. 2002. Productive aging and civic participation. *Journal of Aging Studies*, **16**, 1, 87–105.

Davidhizar, R., Bechtel, G. A., and Woodring, B. C. 2000. The changing role of grandparents. *Journal of Gerontological Nursing*, **26**, 1, 24–9.

de Vaus, D., Gray, M. and Stanton, D. 2003. *Measuring the Value of Unpaid Household, Caring and Voluntary Work of Older Australians*. Research Paper 34, Australian Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne. Available online at www.aifs.org.au/institute/pubs/respaper/rp34.html [Accessed 23 August 2004].

Erikson, E. H., Erikson, J. M. and Kivnick, H. Q. 1986. *Vital Involvement in Old Age*. Norton, New York.

Findlay, R. A. 2003. Interventions to reduce social isolation among older people: where is the evidence? *Ageing & Society*, **23**, 5, 647–58.

Fitzpatrick, M. 2003. *Grandparents Raising Grandchildren*. A report of the project commissioned by the Hon. Larry Anthony. Council of the Aged Australia, Melbourne, July. Available online at http://www.cota.org.au/StratAfiles/SA17,2004.pdf [Accessed 2 November 2004].

Freedman, M. 1997. Towards civic renewal: how senior citizens could save civil society. *Journal of Gerontological Social Work*, **28**, 3, 243–63.

Gibson, D. 1998. *Aged Care: Old Policies, New Problems*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Greenfield, E. A. and Marks, N. F. 2004. Formal volunteering as a protective factor for older adults' psychological well being. *Journal of Gerontology*, **59B**, 5, S258–64.

Hartley, R. (eds) 1995. *Families and Cultural Diversity in Australia*. Allen and Unwin, Sydney.

Healy, J. 2004. *The Benefits of an Ageing Population*. Discussion Paper 63, Australia Institute, Sydney.

Henkin, N. and Kingston, E. 1999. Advancing an intergenerational agenda for the twenty-first century. *Generations*, **22**, 4, 99–105.

Hinterlong, J., Morrow-Howell, N., and Sherraden, M. 2001. Productive aging: principles and perspectives. In Morrow-Howell, N., Hinterlong, J. and Sherraden, M. (eds), *Productive Aging: Concepts and Challenges*. Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, Maryland, 3–18.

Ironmonger, D. 2000. Measuring volunteering in economic terms. In Warburton, J. and Oppenheimer, M. (eds), *Volunteers and Volunteering*. Federation, Sydney, 56–72.

Jendrek, M. P. 1994. Grandparents who parent their grandchildren: circumstances and decisions. *The Gerontologist*, **34**, 206–16.

Kendig, H. 2004. *The Ageing of Australian Society: Economic, Fiscal and Societal Implications*. Task Force Report, Future Summit Australia conference, Sydney, 7 May.

Knack, S. and Keefer, P. 1997. Does social capital have an economic payoff? A cross-country investigation. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, **112**, 4, 1251–89.

Krefting, L. 1991. Rigor in qualitative research: the assessment of trustworthiness. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, **45**, 3, 214–22.

Krueger, R. A. 1994. *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research*. Second edition, Sage, Thousand Oaks, California.

Mayer, P. 2003. *The Wider Economic Value of Social Capital and Volunteering in South Australia*. Report to the Office for Volunteers, Government of South Australia, Adelaide.

Morrow-Howell, N., Hinterlong, J. and Sherraden, M. (eds) 2001. *Productive Aging: Concepts and Challenges*. Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, Maryland.

Onyx, J. and Warburton, J. 2003. Volunteering and health among older people: a review. *Australasian Journal on Ageing*, **22**, 2, 65–9.

Opie, A. 1995. *Beyond Good Intentions: Support Work and Older People*. Institute of Policy Studies, Wellington, New Zealand.

Productivity Commission 2003. *Social Capital: Reviewing the Concept and its Policy Implications*. Commission Research Paper, Productivity Commission, Canberra.

Putnam, R. 1993. *Making Democracy Work*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey.

Quine, S. 1999. Health concerns and expectations of Anglo and ethnic older Australians: a comparative approach. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Gerontology*, **14**, 97–111.

Ranzijn, R. 2001. Motivation for productive ageing in Australia. *Hallym International Journal of Aging*, **3**, 1, 95–113.

Ranzijn, R. 2002. Towards a positive psychology of ageing: potentials and barriers. *Australian Psychologist*, **37**, 2, 79–85.

Ranzijn, R., Harford, J. and Andrews, G. 2002. Ageing and the economy: costs and benefits. *Australasian Journal on Ageing*, **21**, 3, 148–53.

Reynolds, G. P., Wright, J. V. and Beale, B. 2003. The roles of grandparents in educating today's children. *Journal of Instructional Psychology*, **30**, 4, 316–26.

Rook, K. S. and Sorkin, D. H. 2003. Fostering social ties through a volunteer role: implications for older-adults' psychological health. *International Journal of Aging and Human Development*, **57**, 4, 313–37.

Rubin, A. and Babbie, E. 1993. *Research Methods for Social Work*. Second edition, Brooks/Cole, Pacific Grove, California.

Siebert, D. C., Mutran, E. J. and Reitzes, D. C. 1999. Friendship and social support: the importance of role identity to aging adults. *Social Work*, **44**, 6, 522–33.

Soupourmas, F. and Ironmonger, D. 2002. *Giving Time: The Economic and Social Value of Volunteering in Victoria*. Department of Human Services, Victoria Government, Melbourne.

Titmuss, R. M. 1970. *The Gift Relationship: From Human Blood to Social Policy*. Allen and Unwin, London.

Treas, J. and Mazumdar, S. 2004. Kinkeeping and caregiving: contributions of older people in immigrant families. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, **35**, 1, 105–22.

Van Manen, M. 1990. *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy*. State University of New York Press, Albany, New York.

Warburton, J. and Crosier, T. 2001. Are we too busy to volunteer? The relationship between time and volunteering using the 1997 ABS Time Use data. *Australian Journal on Social Issues*, **36**, 4, 295–314.

Warburton, J. and McLaughlin, D. In press. Doing it from your heart: the role of older women as informal volunteers in the community. *Just Policy*, Victoria Council of Social Service, forthcoming.

Wheeler, J., Gorey, K. and Greenblatt, B. 1998. The beneficial effects of volunteering for older adults and the people they serve: a meta analysis. *International Journal of Aging and Human Development*, **47**, 1, 69–79.

Wheelock, J. and Jones, K. 2002. 'Grandparents are the next best thing': informal childcare for working parents in urban Britain. *Journal of Social Policy*, **31**, 3, 441–63.

Wilkinson, J. and Bittman, M. 2002. Neighbourly acts: volunteering, social capital and democracy. *Australian Journal on Volunteering*, **7**, 2, 32–44.

Wilson, J. and Musick, M. 1997. Who cares? Toward an integrated theory of volunteer work. *American Sociological Review*, **62**, 5, 694–713.

Wiscott, R and Kopera-Frye, K. 2000. Sharing of culture: adult grandchildren's perceptions of intergenerational relations. *International Journal of Aging and Human Development*, **51**, 3, 199–215.

Address for correspondence:
Jeni Warburton, Australasian Centre on Ageing, University of Queensland, Queensland 4072, Australia.

e-mail: J.Warburton@social.uq.edu.au