

Vancouver 2010: The volunteer effect



By Andy Levy-Ajzenkopf
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Village Vibes

Ever wondered how an Olympic Games affects volunteerism in the host city after the fact? Actually, not many people have. But a team of researchers from Australia and the UK have set their sights on Vancouver to put together one of the first comprehensive surveys on the subject.

Prior to the Vancouver Winter Olympics, **Dr. Tracey Dickson**, associate professor, Centre for Tourism Research with the [University of Canberra](#), and colleagues **Dr. Angela Benson** ([University of Brighton](#)), **Dr. Deborah Edwards** and Associate Professor **Simon Darcy** ([University of Technology, Sydney](#)) and Professor **Deborah Blackman** (University of Canberra), conducted a survey to find out how Vancouverites felt about volunteering for the games.

Their preliminary findings showed that respondents to the survey titled **Olympic And Paralympic Legacies: the 2010 volunteers' story so far...** overall were feeling more compelled to volunteer.

Nearly 25% intend to volunteer more after the Games, 4% will decrease or stop, and more than one-third said they would volunteer at a future Games, according to data provided by Dickson.

Lasting impressions

The initial findings are only the tip of the statistical iceberg. Dickson and her fellow researchers will be conducting the second, perhaps more important part of their research starting later this month and through November with the help of the folks at [Volunteer BC](#).

She's also scheduled to give a keynote speech at a Volunteer BC conference later this month. The organization has titled Dickson's address "Volunteering Legacy After the 2010 Olympic Games — Fact or Fiction?"

Dickson will be conducting interviews and focus groups in Whistler, Vancouver, and Kamloops as well as more surveys "to explore" the legacy and determine who is volunteering more and who is volunteering less since the Olympics. Where are these people offering their time and service? And who is *more likely* to volunteer more or less?

Her research team will also look at how to train organizations and people to "enhance a volunteer legacy in host cities and ask how we can we manage more effectively to enhance the legacy of mega sporting events," she said. Both Dickson and Volunteer BC aren't yet sure how this will play out, as only the completion of the second survey will inform their next steps.

Why do this now?

"What inspired the research was a comment by someone in Whistler in 2008, when I was there for a conference, that they expected there to be a volunteer legacy from the games that would be of benefit to their community, and I just wondered whether that would be the case," Dickson told CharityVillage. "When I looked into the research that had been done on Olympic, Paralympic, and Masters Games, there was very little that had looked at what happened after the games. So that is where we have started."

Committee approved

Dickson and her team have also garnered the support of the major players on the Olympics scene.

"This is an IPC [International Paralympic Committee], and IOC [International Olympic Committee] approved project and we have been thankful for the support of the IPC, IOC, and VANOC [Vancouver Organizing Committee for the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Games]," she said.

She added that the interest is in exploring "what if any legacy there is to the community, such as whether people increase their volunteering as a result of the Games, and if so, which organizations are most likely to benefit. With this, we are also thinking of exploring whether there is a particular 'type' of volunteer that may be more likely to volunteer more."

The team is interested in themes including people's experience of volunteering (**Anne Terwiel** from [Thompson Rivers University](#) is also looking at this with **Alpine Volunteers**), their motivations for volunteering, and where they are volunteering (sports, education, health, arts, etc.) since the games ended, Dickson noted.

An enthused BC nonprofit

For its part, Volunteer BC is thrilled with the prospect of having this kind of data to analyze. **Lorelynn Hart**, project manager with Volunteer BC, said her organization is honoured to be part of this project.

"We have partnered with Dr. Dickson because the research she is undertaking is the first of its kind for any host city. Her results can be shared with other large events that want to ensure a volunteering legacy — such as the Pan Am Games in Toronto or Sochi 2014," she said. "Her research will help build the awareness of the importance of volunteers and the impact volunteers have to any organization and BC communities, whether large or small."

Hart noted that Volunteer BC released "a very comprehensive" study" last year — the *BC State of Volunteering Report* — which provided an overview of the health of volunteerism in the province. Interested readers can view that report here: bcstateofvolunteering.org.

In the past, BC has led the country with the highest number of volunteer hours given annually: 199 (compared to a national average of 168), Hart said, though she admitted that in 2007, based on the [2007 Canadian Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participation](#) study, the province's numbers "declined slightly."

Asked whether her organization had any evidence, anecdotally or otherwise, that might suggest a strong impact on volunteerism left by the recent games, Hart said there wasn't much to go on yet.

"From Volunteer BC's perspective we cannot verify or track whether there has been a significant increase of volunteerism in the province after the Olympic Games. It is too early to say." However, talks with some of her organization's volunteer centres across the province have shown that "they have seen no significant change yet."

Hart said an example of one organization that has shown a recent increase in volunteering is the [BC Games Society](#), who host the BC Games once a year.

"They saw a major increase in volunteers for summer Games. There was a volunteer application spike during the Olympic Games," she said.

Hart also clarified that while Volunteer BC is not involved with the actual research being conducted by Dickson, they plan to partner with her and promote her research to the volunteer sector and other large events once the research is complete.

While it's anyone's guess what kind of data Dickson and her team will turn up, the critical importance of this information continues to keep many minds thinking about the 2010 Vancouver Games.