

Question: Can you provide the Committee with a brief description of the NSW Government's Timebanking initiative?

Answer: Timebanking is an online community tool that enables members to collect a credit for each hour of their volunteering in local communities, and to seek support from other members with something they need, paying for it with the accumulated credits. Timebanking is free to join for those aged 18 years and over, and families may also join, facilitating the participation of children and younger people.

Timebanking commenced in NSW in November 2012 as a trial in the Hunter and Central Coast regions. At the conclusion of the trial in December 2013, more than 4,000 people had exchanged 8,000 hours of support.

An independent evaluation of the trial, by a team from the Universities of Wollongong and Newcastle, found that Timebanking had broadened the scope of volunteering within NSW and forged healthier, happier and more productive individuals and communities. They argued that through refinement and further innovation, Timebanking could be expected to grow and redefine volunteering and what it means to be a volunteer in new ways into the future.

The evaluation team also found that Timebanking works best at a grassroots level; it is more productive to operate several local sites where neighbours are helping neighbours, than one all-encompassing organisation across a large area. Such local scale is more able to seamlessly contribute to local communities and meet local needs. One third of Timebanking members were new to volunteering which means it attracts new people to giving in this way.

Timebanking provides pathways to individuals that may not previously have felt they have a contribution to make in volunteering programs. Those from backgrounds of disadvantage can find opportunities to engage more fully within the community through Timebanking - so that they can discover valued and productive contributions to society. For example - 15% of evaluation survey respondents had found paid employment through their participation in the Timebanking trial. This establishes the power of Timebanking as a valuable driver of employability and participation.

Based on this success, Timebanking has been expanded to 44 pilot sites. By 30 June 2014, 4,550 Timebanking members have made 1,948 trades, resulting in 12,567 banked hours. Of active members, 76% have given time and banked hours and 46% have received a service from someone else.

The increase in individuals receiving support from one another, from 21% in the trial period to 46% in 2014, supports an evaluation finding that as users become accustomed to the reciprocal relationships at the heart of Timebanking, their participation and trading increases. Opportunities exist not just for individuals to participate in Timebanking, but also for community based organisations, schools, councils and local businesses to become involved. The trial has seen more than 390 organisations join as members.

The Minister for Citizenship and Communities has announced that a further 20 communities will have access to Timebanking by the end 2014.

The Timebanking evaluation is at: <http://www.volunteering.nsw.gov.au/about-us/evaluation-and-research>

Timebanking may be explored at: www.timebanking.com.au.

Author: Simon Watts, Director, NSW Volunteering. 8 July 2014.