

# Weaving the community together

Volunteering benefits both the person donating their time and those they support. Sophie Boladeras meets some of the island's finest volunteers and discovers the benefits of working for free.

Community can be defined in multiple ways: a unified body of individuals; people with common interests living in a particular area; a group of people with a common characteristic within a larger society; or as a social state or condition.

How has a sense of community on Waiheke developed? Is it because of an active group of people pursuing shared interests, in the arts, environment or sports? Because they come together regularly to reach goals, to develop hobbies, to replant dunes or to drink coffee?

One aspect of community creation is volunteering, and opportunities to do so on Waiheke are abundant. Supporting others creates and cultivates a community that cares, and a new website is making the process easier by pairing potential volunteers with organisations looking for support.

"Making a Difference" or 'MAD' sets up local not-for-profit organisations with volunteers," says organiser Pam Oliver.

"It's part of Project Forever Waiheke, which is about developing sustainable communities and tourism, and a key goal is to promote community engagement.



Anna Dawson regularly volunteers her time removing trash from Waiheke's beaches.



After sailing through the Pacific Anna was inspired to begin working to clean up the ocean.

"It's a place for people to go who aren't quite sure what they want to get involved in. For those who are new to the island, or come over on weekends, it's an excellent way to meet new people."

## Anna Dawson

Ocean-lover Anna Dawson sailed with her partner from New Zealand to Tonga, Fiji, Tuvalu, Kiribati and the Marshall Islands.

"It was in the Marshalls, these remote and incredibly beautiful atolls that we found a lot of plastic," she says.

This experience ignited a flurry of research as Anna strove to find out why there was an accumulation of plastics in the area when it seemed the locals were mainly consuming breadfruit and fish.

"These experiences took a while to settle, but when they did, it became clear we needed to do something about the issue of plastic in the ocean," she says.

"We watched documentaries like 'Bag It', and 'A Plastic Ocean', and consumed as much information as we could."

Since moving to Waiheke in 2017, Anna set up her business, Plastic Free Pantry, and regularly organises volunteer-led beach cleanups. She's also volunteered in local community gardens and alongside the Waiheke Resources Trust organising events for Plastic Free July.

### How do you think volunteering benefits the community?

"Working towards a common goal is the foundation of a thriving community, and so volunteer efforts strengthen communities."

"Being out volunteering in beach cleanups makes me endeavour to live without using plastic."  
- Anna Dawson

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**What long-term impact do you want your volunteer work to have for the island?**

“Beach cleanups don’t have an obvious long term impact unfortunately, as a lot of the rubbish gets washed up in storms and is subject to the global plastic situation. However, they bring people together in a moment and there tend to be significant initiatives coming out of them.

“One concrete thing we have started doing is recording data from our cleanups as part of the Sustainable Coastlines national litter database. This will be used to help inform policy change. Being out volunteering in beach cleanups personally makes me more driven to live that cause in our home and to endeavour to live without using plastic.”

**Why would you encourage others to get involved?**

“It’s an excellent way to catch up with people, and chatting and doing physical work at the same time feels innate. The more some



Jules Pattison right with members of the Kaitiaki of Newton Reserve team.

“Biodiversity benefits everyone; it brings back native birdlife, fauna and flora.”

- Jules Pattison

a life member. JPs play a critical role and David has served tirelessly in the Waiheke community.

**What do you do in your voluntary role?**

“I helped to set up authorised Justice of the Peace service desks, and there are now around 67 in the Auckland region. Being a JP used to be considered a real honour – for that reason, many people would become JPs but wouldn’t necessarily be active in the role. At the library, I see up to 20 people per week and support them with ministerial JP duties, which include witnessing signatures, certifying copies, documents and proof of identity.”

**How does volunteering contribute to your life?**

“I enjoy interacting with people. It’s great to be able to offer a free service, in particular when people from other countries like Argentina can utilise my services they’re often surprised that we provide this free of charge.

“I came to Waiheke as a stranger, but volunteering enabled me to immediately become part of the community. If I didn’t do that, I could have remained a stranger for a long time. There is a need for volunteers here.”

Jules Pattison

Jules and her husband were married on



David Grove volunteers his time as an accredited Justice of the Peace at Waiheke Library. Photo Sophie Boladeras

of us work on computers, the less we get these opportunities and physical volunteer work such as beach cleanups, community gardening, tree planting, whatever it may be, seem to almost fill a hole.”

David Grove

David Grove is using his accreditation as a Justice of the Peace to support locals and visitors to the island. David is a former president of the Auckland Justices of the Peace Association and was recently appointed

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- David Grove

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Tim Feather coordinates a community weed and pest control project in Te Aroha Valley that has been running since the beginning of this year.

Waiheke and moved here this year after retiring from hectic jobs in Auckland city as health professionals. Despite only moving to the island recently, Jules has been a volunteer here working to regenerate Newton Reserve for the past ten years. Until 2016 she also volunteered for the Citizens' Advice Bureau in Oneroa.

**How does volunteering benefit your life?**

"I love being busy. I love to walk in the reserve and I'm always amazed at how well the regenerated bush is doing. I love meeting the volunteers each month and enjoy the fact that they all work for the good of others. The progress that is made by volunteers in the reserve inspires me to keep working on our goals."

**How does volunteering benefit others?**

"Biodiversity benefits everyone. It brings back native birdlife, fauna and flora. Visitors to the island walking along the track between Little Oneroa and the end of Newton Road have been able to enjoy the restored ecology and many have stopped and congratulated us on the wonderful progress."

**Why would you encourage others to get**

**involved?**

"Being involved in our project is a real pleasure. Every month a bunch of us from a diverse range of backgrounds meet to plant and weed in the reserve. Some volunteers have been coming for years, and some are new to the project."

"We see the results of previous efforts enhancing the environment. We have lunch and a laugh at the end of the morning. We learn from each other as well as from the owner of the nursery that provides our plants."

**Tim Feather**

Tim, who coordinates a community weed and pest control project in Te Aroha Valley, was introduced to the island by his wife Jackie in the 1980s.

"She had a bach here, we fell in love and the rest is history, including her selling it, but that's another story," he says. The couple bought a section in the valley in 2002 with the dream of building. In 2015 they built a lovely little house nestled in the regenerating bush – a short walk to Hekerua Bay.

"Volunteering is good for the soul and you get to meet your neighbours, get fit, watch the fruits of your labour grow, contribute your skills and learn new ones."  
- Tim Feather



Tim Feather says he loves being part of a community of people who are passionate about caring for the environment.

**What volunteer projects have you been involved in on Waiheke?**

"I initiated and am a coordinator for a community weed and pest control project in Te Aroha Valley that has been running since the beginning of this year. It is a beautiful valley, formerly farmland, with regenerating bush and no road access."

"Everyone who lives in the valley has to walk in and building here is a challenge which has resulted in fewer properties and more forest. The problem we have is that weeds and predators multiply faster than the

forest. Part of what we are doing is restoring the wetland areas of the stream and revegetating along it, which will reduce pollution entering the sea."

**How does volunteering benefit your life?**

"I get to be part of a community of people who are passionate about caring for their environment and form new friendships along the way. I am a landscape architect by profession as well, and this project allows me to use my skills to benefit the environment and the community."

**Why would you encourage others to get involved?**

"It's good for the soul, and you get to meet your neighbours, get fit, watch the fruits of your labours grow, contribute your skills and learn new ones." •

If you're looking for volunteers or would like to offer your services as a volunteer, visit [foreverwaiheke.com](http://foreverwaiheke.com) and click on the 'madaboutwaiheke' tab.

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