

Submission by Jonathan Tam to the Australian Government Productivity Commission Not-for-Profit Sector Study

I am an undergraduate student at the University of New South Wales (UNSW) in my third year of a Commerce/Computer Science degree. My interest in this topic stems from:

- My involvement in a local church
I am currently a member of a local community church called NSCCCS (North Shore Community Christian Church Sydney) which is located in Gordon. I grew up in that church during my high school years and am now serving there, helping to lead the youth group and the English service.
- My current employment at a not-for-profit organization
I am doing paid work as an accounts clerk at a not-for-profit organisation called AFES. (Australian Fellowship of Evangelical Students)
- RICE (Inter-Church Evangelism)
Collective group of around 50 churches from all over the Sydney Metropolitan area.

The views here are my own and do not represent those of my church NSCCCS, the RICE movement or my employer AFES.

Comments are invited on how well previous Australian studies have captured the contributions of the sector, particularly whether there are significant gaps in coverage or methodological measurement issues.

How do not-for-profit organisations contribute?

As an involved member of my local church, I thought it appropriate to mention some of the ways that NSCCCs has – in my opinion – helped to develop social capital, strengthen the local community or has in some other way been of benefit to the wider community.

The majority of our congregation are of a Chinese descent and in particular a significant proportion of our church members are recent migrants from either mainland China or Hong Kong. As a result, we have entire families coming to our church who know very little English and who know very little about the Australian culture. However, participation in our regular church activities – including our weekly services, Bible study groups, youth groups and social gathering – the young people in particular have grown and developed their language skills as well as their knowledge of Australian culture. This has far-reaching and long term benefits, because as well as the youth being more comfortable in the way they communicate to others in their schools, it will enable a smoother transition into the workforce in the future. In addition, as our church is part of a network of Chinese churches with a similar demographic to ours, I feel that as a body of churches, this opportunity for new migrants to enter into a community where they can be accustomed to local language and culture plays a significant role in the integration of new migrants into the Australian community.

NSCCCs also runs formal and informal divorce and depression counselling by pastors and senior members of the church. Despite my age, I have already seen the benefits of this as I have witnessed the fruits of a reconciled marriage in the lives and homes of the youth who once had broken families.

Also, NSCCCs runs a youth group on Friday nights in partnership with another local church, Gordon

Baptist Church (<http://www.gordonbaptist.org.au/>). It is run weekly during the school term and the program consists of games, short talks, a Bible study, videos and music. It is a safe and welcoming environment in which high schoolers have the opportunity not only to meet and interact with other peers in the community in a real and meaningful way but also to come and learn more about Jesus; about His moral teachings and the significance of His existence for high schoolers today. Along with all the Christian churches in Sydney who run Friday night youth groups, it offers young people of today an alternative culture and lifestyle to the mainstream one, which more recently has been characterised by drug and alcohol abuse as well as underage partying.

NSCCCs also brings together the community in charity and outreach initiatives as we seek to care for those in need. For example, last year we ran a garage sale fundraiser for the Sichuan earthquake, where members of the church donated household items to be sold, the proceeds of which were sent to the victims in China. By uniting behind a common goal, members of the local community who wouldn't otherwise cross paths were able to engage and support one another in this effort.

As well, last Christmas our church took part in "Operation Christmas Child" (http://www.samaritanspurse.org.au/occ_08_index.shtml), an initiative whereby churches from around the world are encouraged to fill a shoebox full of toys and trinkets to be given as a Christmas gift to children in third-world-countries. These activities not only raise awareness as to the needs of others less fortunate than us, but also bring together the community in supporting a worthy cause.

However, the last and perhaps the most pertinent way that I feel that Christian churches in particular, as part of the not-for-profit sector, contribute to the lives of Australians is that it provides an answer to an entire generation of people searching for purpose and meaning in their existence. In a society filled with the scars of broken relationships, it allows people to worship the living God, who cared about us and who wanted to have a relationship with us so much that he sent his son, Jesus, to die for us so that we could be reconciled with him. As such, the church provides an avenue for those seeking for answers and the hope of an eternity with God after this life.

Not for profit organisations are invited to comment on their experiences with attracting both paid and volunteer workers with the appropriate level of skills.

Not for profit organisations are invited to share their thoughts on pre-requisites for success (including 'stand-out models' within the sector).

NSCCCs is also part of larger networks of churches who run larger events and activities throughout the year. In particular, RICE (www.riceevent.org.au) is an organisation that started in 2002 and has grown into a movement of over 50 Christian churches all across Sydney. RICE runs a number of events each year, the biggest and most notable of which are two youth outreach events. In 2008, these events attracted over 4000 high schoolers over the course of two weekends. Due to the scale of these events, RICE cannot be run without the efforts of a large volunteer base. For the past few years, RICE has been able to attract about 300 volunteers annually to help out at these events, consisting largely of university students and young workers. The resource demands of RICE have grown to such an extent that for the first time this year, there are now paid staff employed to devote more of their time and efforts into the RICE organisation.

The abounding success of the RICE movement over the past few years of its history, and particularly its ability to attract passionate and committed volunteers, can be attributed for the large part to the leadership of the movement, and in particular to the director of the RICE movement Reverend Steve Chong. Under Christ, Steve has pioneered and developed RICE as a movement that seeks to "convict, mobilise, equip, train and revitalise the next generation to serve the Lord Jesus Christ". By casting this vision to the young

leaders and encouraging them to see the value in this aim, the leaders make it their own personal vision and their own personal aim. For Christians who have been taken hold of this vision, it becomes natural for volunteers to devote their time, money and energy into telling the high school students of this city about Jesus!

Comments are invited on the incentives (such as community attitudes and views of donors) on not for profit organisations to operate efficiently and effectively and to take innovative approaches.

AFES (<http://www.afes.org.au>) is an organisation that oversees and supports Christian student groups at universities and campuses in every state and territory in Australia. As such, AFES is heavily reliant on donations for its day-to-day operational costs as well as expenses associated with employing staff to work alongside student volunteers on campus. I work in the national office (located in Kingsford), which manages donations and disbursements for AFES staff from all across Australia. My role at AFES centres mainly on the use of MYOB as well as general data entry to record collections, fringe benefits and employee expenses.

As an office team, our incentive to operate efficiently and effectively is derived from the belief that donors will feel more comfortable donating money to us if they are assured that we are handling their money professionally and are recording it accurately and in a timely way.

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission. I am available to discuss any part of this submission with the committee.

Yours faithfully,
Jonathan Tam