

## 100 VOLUNTEERS - BEARING GIFTS

Over the past four years I've been initiating and sustaining a vibrant intentional community spirit in many parishes in the Macarthur and Shoalhaven parishes of the Wollongong Diocese. 100 parish volunteers assist people with special needs to live rich and participating lives within their parishes - helping them bear the gift of their lives.

When I am invited into parishes I begin by speaking at all the celebrations of Eucharist on a given weekend. I always apply the Gospel of the Sunday to the area of disability and I quote Archbishop Carroll's apology to all families who have members with special needs for the times that they might have felt unsupported, excluded or hurt by the church. Then I follow the apology with the fact that saying 'sorry' is not enough and that this parish wishes to offer practical support to families - hence the recruiting and training of volunteers and introducing them to the folk with special needs who make themselves known to me.

The aim of implementing these intentional mini communities is to promote positive and transformative change in the area of church and disability. The focus is broad - one parish might sponsor a social group such as the Good News Community that offers 4 hours of support and friendship to those with special needs as well as respite to parents/carers on a Saturday afternoon. Other parishes offer visitation programs and hospitality at the weekend masses.

Volunteers sign Prohibitive Employment Declarations before they make a commitment. I invite all volunteers back to three monthly supervision sessions to support, affirm and encourage them to bear the gift of their lives to others.

Jeanie Heininger

