



the frontstarts

Accountants

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Who

Volunteer



INSPIRING ACCOUNTANTS

Accountancy skills are sought all over the world – often by people and organisations who know they need help but cannot afford a professional or even find one locally.

That's where many **accountants are stepping up as volunteers, joining organisations in their home towns or even travelling abroad on assignments to help organisations in developing countries.**

While their finance and analytical skills are highly valued, the interviewees in this ebook say **volunteering has challenged them to think in new ways, draw on strengths they didn't know they had and helped them in their professional lives.**

Some have become volunteers because of a personal connection to a charity, while others have signed up to Accountants for International Development (AfID), which has matched their skills to a need.

Read on for their inspiring stories.

- 1** **ROBYN CAMERON** CPA
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STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

INSPIRING ACCOUNTANTS

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Robyn Cameron (centre) at the Gold Coast Mother's Day Classic fun run.

“I’m not a scientist, but what I could do was fundraise. It was because of research undertaken prior to my own breast cancer diagnosis that I survived. It’s my turn to give back.”

ROBYN CAMERON CPA

ROBYN CAMERON CPA

ONE OF AUSTRALIA'S TOP FUNDRAISERS FOR THE NATIONAL BREAST CANCER FOUNDATION

The first time Robyn Cameron CPA was diagnosed with breast cancer, she was aged just 38, studying an undergraduate degree in accounting and raising two young children.

The diagnosis was a huge shock for Cameron, who ran half-marathons and had no family history of the disease. After a lumpectomy, she underwent eight weeks of radiation therapy.

"I'd get the kids off to school, work on an assignment or go to class, then jump in the car in the afternoon and do a trip to Brisbane [70km away], have my treatment and drive back home," says Cameron, who is now a senior lecturer at Griffith University's Business School.

"The next day would be the same again."

Her second diagnosis came in 2004. She was 46, working full-time and halfway through her PhD.

"It was a lot scarier," she says. The chemotherapy was tough, and she had to take time off from work and study. Yet once again Cameron recovered, returned to work and, in 2008, submitted her PhD.

After her ordeal, Cameron wanted to help other women facing breast cancer. She decided to put

her energy into raising funds for the National Breast Cancer Foundation (NBCF), an organisation focused on supporting research.

Her first event was a movie night at Griffith University in 2005 that raised A\$2800. She went on to host morning teas at the university, founded the Pink Ribbon Cup Raceday at the Gold Coast Turf Club in 2008, and set up the Gold Coast Mother's Day Classic fun run in 2009.

The Pink Ribbon Cup Raceday became so popular, with tickets selling out each year, that in 2017 it became the NBCF's largest community fundraiser in Australia.

"There's a lot of time that goes into it," Cameron says.

"I'll be sitting at my computer on the weekend thinking, 'I wouldn't mind being at the beach', then I'll get an email [from a business owner] saying, 'Robyn, can I donate something?'"

She believes the CPA designation at the end of her signature has helped her fundraising, as donors are confident she will be honest and ethical with any money raised.

[Click here to read the entire article.](#)



“I would encourage anyone who has the desire to contribute to the community through an NFP without reward, and to *do so with passion and gusto.* Use your particular skill set to add value where it really counts.”

DAVID HARRIS CPA

FOOD CHARITY FARESHARE PUTS THE SKILLS AND EXPERIENCE OF DAVID HARRIS CPA TO GOOD USE

Being in a leadership role with a large not-for-profit (NFP) organisation is extremely challenging, but it is also immensely satisfying, according to David Harris CPA, president of the board of FareShare, which collects food donations and transforms them into cooked meals for people in need.

At the same time, he is a founder and co-director of resource recovery and reverse logistics firm TIC Group (The Ideas Company). It was TIC Group that led him to FareShare.

“In 2005, TIC Group was involved in managing customer returns for a number of Australia’s leading retailers,” Harris says.

“I was approached by Coles Supermarkets to find a solution for the problem of food products being discarded due to damaged packaging and other issues. I developed a model that facilitated the rescue of these products and their subsequent donation to charities. Based on this, a board member of FareShare – then known as One Umbrella – asked me to join their board. As soon as I understood the important work the organisation was doing I was happy to jump in.”

At that time, the organisation was producing about 45,000 meals a year. Over the past three years this number has jumped to over 1.25 million meals. In addition, FareShare also rescues almost one million kilograms of food a year destined for landfill, which it distributes, uncooked, to agencies in need.

A handful of volunteers has grown to over 1000, with a waiting list of another 1200.

The organisation has acquired additional premises, which will enable it to expand distribution into regional Victoria and South Australia.

In 2018, FareShare purchased a building in Brisbane and converted it into a charity kitchen. It aims to cook up to four million meals a year for distribution throughout Queensland and New South Wales.

Harris says his CPA Australia certification and expertise have proved invaluable throughout his career in business and the NFP sector.

“Based on my NFP work, I believe that while organisations such as FareShare are clearly charities, they need to be run on business lines,” he says. “Profit might not be the ultimate goal, but we need to use resources effectively.”

ABOUT FARESHARE

FareShare rescues surplus food and cooks and distributes free, nutritious meals for people in need via soup vans, homeless shelters, women’s refuges and community food banks.

[Click here to read the entire article.](#)



“I’m working with a completely different group of people ... all focused on positively impacting people’s lives. It’s really rewarding.”

LOUISE ROBERTS CPA

LOUISE ROBERTS CPA USES HER EXPERT FINANCE SKILLS TO HELP PEOPLE REALISE THEIR PARALYMPIC SPORTING DREAMS

When Kerryn Harvey fell off her bike in the Adelaide Hills in 2013, she got up, dusted herself off, got a few stitches in her elbow and thought that was that.

Then her injury deteriorated. Doctors diagnosed necrotising fasciitis, an infection caused by rare flesh-eating bacteria, and amputated her right arm and shoulder in an effort to save her life.

“The world nearly lost her,” says Louise Roberts CPA, finance director on the board of START foundation, the charity Harvey founded after her accident. The organisation provides grants to amputees for prosthetic limbs, limb devices and modified equipment, so they can be active in sport. START foundation recognises the importance of physical activity to the health and wellbeing of amputees.

“We work to empower amputees in life, through sport,” Roberts explains.

As START foundation’s finance director, Roberts helps oversee accounts, reports to the board on the charity’s financial position and works with the board on annual budgets and forecasts.

“I [also] do all of the compliance and reporting requirements for ASIC (Australian Securities and Investments Commission), ACNC (Australian Charities and Not-For-Profits Commission) and all

the licences that we hold in various states,” says Roberts, a member of the Victorian Women’s CPA Network.

Roberts’ involvement with START began in 2014, when a former colleague put her in touch with one of the founding directors.

“They were looking for someone with finance skills, so I contacted her and we had a conversation. The work they were doing sounded really exciting and worthwhile.”

Roberts has found working with START an enriching experience. “I’m working with a completely different group of people ... all focused on positively impacting people’s lives. It’s really rewarding.”

ABOUT START FOUNDATION

Providing grants to help amputees keep playing sport, START foundation operates with the support of sponsors, donors and volunteers.

Grant recipients can use funds to purchase prosthetic limbs, limb modifications or other equipment they need to participate in sport.

[Click here to read the entire article.](#)



“I feel that after a while you just work, and you earn your living. I think we need to give something back to the society.”

ALEX OOI FCPA

ALEX OOI FCPA IS HELPING TO DEVELOP THE NEXT GENERATION OF LIONS CLUBS COMMUNITY LEADERS

Alex Ooi FCPA realised he didn't want to just work, he wanted to do more to help others.

"I feel that after a while you just work, and you earn your living. I think we need to give something back to the society," says the director of the Audit Oversight Board for the Securities Commission Malaysia.

It was back in 2002 that a partner at Deloitte, his then employer, introduced Ooi to Lions Club of Kuala Lumpur (Host). Fifteen years later, Ooi is deeply involved as Lions Clubs International Foundation District 308B1 coordinator in Malaysia, covering 120 Lions Clubs.

"My club is one of the prime clubs that set up the Kuala Lumpur Lions Renal Centre," says Ooi. The centre provides subsidised care to those who cannot afford to attend private hospitals for dialysis treatment.

Ooi likes that the contribution his Lions Club makes is always changing, with a mix of community service and humanitarian efforts.

Projects can range from supporting residents in aged care facilities, visiting an orphanage or supporting the production of prosthetic limbs.

There are also initiatives to help impoverished rural students in Malaysia with the cost of uniforms and school bags.

Ooi has been instrumental in setting up a college-based Leo club in Malaysia, the Omega Leo Club of Brickfields Asia College, which is a Lions offshoot for members aged 18 to 30 years.

"Leos are our future generations of leaders," says Ooi, who has shared his expertise by equipping Leos and older Lions in the community group with skills in treasury and financial accountability. It's the area of which he is perhaps most proud.

"I can give the knowledge that I have gained from my studies, my work, my professional life, back to society," he says.

ABOUT LIONS CLUBS INTERNATIONAL FOUNDATION

Established in 1968, the foundation supports the efforts of Lions Clubs and their partners to serve communities, locally and globally. It allows Lions Clubs International to tackle global problems and large-scale humanitarian projects.

[Click here to read the entire article.](#)



PRADEEP RAJ RAGHU RAJA PILLAY CPA HAS SCORED A BIG VICTORY IN HIS FIGHT FOR THE EARLY DETECTION OF AUTISM IN CHILDREN

Pradeep Raj Raghu Raja Pillay CPA had never competed in a kickboxing match. However, he knew the sport's reputation for toughness would be the perfect way to catch people's attention for a cause he was passionate about – the early detection of autism in children as young as 12 months.

The father-of-one knew of the Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre (OTARC) at La Trobe University, which was “doing a fantastic job”, but so underfunded its early assessment clinic for young children had been forced to close.

The centre has developed a comprehensive questionnaire for maternal and child health nurses to use for children aged 12, 18 and 24 months. This identifies autism red flags, including inconsistent eye contact and lack of gestures, such as pointing at objects.

“That's specialist knowledge not all the [child health] nurses have,” Raj explains. “The hardest part in the autism journey is getting a diagnosis, because only when you get a diagnosis will you be able to go for funding, then you can start with your early intervention therapies straight away.”

Raj says that if you don't catch children on the autism spectrum early, “it's hard to get them to an independent and functional level later in life”.

Raj had been working out at his local Muay Thai boxing gym on and off for about a year, but to take part in a fight, he had to submit to eight weeks of intensive training, diet management and weigh-ins. This included up to three hours of personal training, running, Muay Thai sessions and sparring each day after work. He had to follow a strict sugarless and alcohol-free diet over the summer holidays.

Raj took the strict regime, plus bruised ribs from sparring, in his stride. He ran talks at his workplace and started social media campaign #PradeepsFight4AutismAwareness. Dynamite Muay Thai Fight Gym hosted the event and donated part of the entrance fees on fight day to the cause. Media coverage helped Raj surpass his fundraising target of A\$5000, raising more than A\$6500. While raising awareness for autism was his main aim, Raj also won his very first Muay Thai fight – proving that accountants can pack a punch!

ABOUT OLGA TENNISON AUTISM CENTRE

The Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre is dedicated to advancing knowledge of the nature and causes of autism. Approximately one in every 100 children born in Australia has autism.

[Click here to read the entire article.](#)



“I put all the policies and procedures and finance systems in place and created budgets and [oversaw] cash flow.”

EMMA YOUNG ASA

AS THE CFO OF ORANGE SKY, EMMA YOUNG ASA HAS FOUND HER CALLING IN A ROLE THAT “WAS MEANT TO BE”

It was a single moment that changed Emma Young's life. Walking the streets of London on a freezing night, the accountant was confronted by the sight of a homeless person battling to survive the conditions.

“It really hit me that I was going home to a warm bed and some people weren't,” Young says. That night, she began looking for ways to help people down on their luck and started volunteering at a winter shelter for the homeless.

Young, who worked for News International as a finance analyst, became passionate about the cause. She realised homelessness “could potentially happen to anybody who has, for instance, health issues, a broken relationship, or loses their job”.

When Young returned home to Brisbane, she came across Orange Sky Laundry, an innovative start-up that was putting vans on the road equipped with washing machines and driers to launder clothes for some of Australia's estimated 116,000 people experiencing homelessness.

Young started helping the Brisbane-based service and soon realised the start-up needed stronger financial processes. “I jumped in and started helping with that,” she says. “I put all the policies and procedures and finance systems in place and created budgets and [oversaw] cash flow.

“I was doing more and more hours as a volunteer and eventually the CEO [of Orange Sky] pulled me aside and said, ‘we need a full-time accountant and would love for you to come and work for us’.”

It was, Young says, her dream job. She is now Orange Sky's chief financial officer. Like all the 30 staff and 1000 volunteers, she still spends time on the road, helping to fill shifts in the vans.

Young says sustainability is one of her main priorities. “We have 24 vans across Australia and I want them to be running for as long as they're needed by our friends on the street. I'm continually trying to look ahead to what we're going to need to sustain those vans.

ABOUT ORANGE SKY

Orange Sky visits 170 parks and drop-in centres around Australia. It offers a mobile laundry service to people experiencing homelessness in the community, and recently launched mobile shower services in Brisbane, Sydney, and Melbourne.

[Click here to read the entire article.](#)



“Loise [PRI’s accountant] did the month-end [reports] for March and April and sent them through to me to look at. It was two months of beautiful stuff that all reconciled and contained everything we had been talking about. It nearly made me cry.”

PENELOPE JAMES CPA

AN URGE TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE DREW PENELOPE JAMES CPA TO A PERMACULTURE PROJECT IN KENYA, WHERE HER ACCOUNTING SKILLS HELPED BUILD FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND CONFIDENCE

A growing passion for social justice and concern for the future of the environment encouraged Penelope James CPA to seek the right opportunity to give back.

A conversation with accounting friends introduced her to Accounting for International Development (AFiD), a CPA Australia-supported social enterprise that links experienced finance professionals with volunteering opportunities with not-for-profits around the globe.

AFiD suggested options, but the one that stood out was the Permaculture Research Institute Kenya (PRI-Kenya).

“I knew it had to be Africa, which has historically been pillaged by the Western world,” James says.

“It’s a place where a lot of work needs to be put in to have a safer world and I feel we need a more equitable distribution of resources.”

In February 2018, she travelled to Nairobi for five weeks to help with building the capacity of PRI-Kenya’s head office team.

Working out of a tiny office affected by regular power outages, and with two desks for five people, she helped PRI’s accountant learn Xero, worked with its director to develop a big-picture overview and

analysed the various programs being offered to tighten budgets and establish income-generating cash flows.

Apart from instilling skills and knowledge, James boosted the team’s confidence.

Just 18 months earlier, US\$110,000 had been embezzled from the NGO, which resulted in a loss of donors and left the organisation financially fragile. By working to enhance the transparency of the NGO and strengthen its financial base, James was able to help entice donors back on board, restoring hope.

James says the experience has enriched her life and she maintains contact with the people she worked with in Kenya.

ABOUT PERMACULTURE RESEARCH INSTITUTE KENYA

Permaculture Research Institute Kenya seeks to empower East African communities to become climate resilient, healthy and food secure by taking a holistic approach to farming. PRI-Kenya’s philosophy is based on embracing the relationships in nature as a tool to create sustainable ecosystems.

[Click here to read the entire article.](#)



“A CPA is someone who has business acumen, a professional approach and an ethical grounding.”

LEO TUTT FCPA

LEO TUTT FCPA RECEIVED ORDER OF AUSTRALIA MEMBERSHIP FOR HIS CHARITY WORK HELPING PEOPLE WITH DIABETES

It's not unusual to find that people who volunteer their time often have a personal interest in the cause for which they volunteer. For Leo Tutt FCPA, however, it's clear passion for his cause runs particularly deep.

"I've always volunteered my time for various causes, even back at university, but I decided I really wanted to do it for people with diabetes," Tutt says. "I cared about it, I wanted to help people and give back and that's still what drives me. I feel incredibly passionate about it."

Tutt's dedication is partly due to having type 1 diabetes himself, diagnosed when he was a university student.

"I'd done my economics degree and was doing my law degree," he recalls. "During this time, I applied for some vacation work at an accounting firm and had to fill out a health form. I ticked that I had type 1 diabetes and was informed that 'we don't employ people with that condition'. It was a wake-up call to the stigma that health conditions can carry." By 1998, Tutt was volunteering for Diabetes NSW & ACT.

He has served as director of Diabetes NSW & ACT since 2001 and was appointed chair of the board in 2010.

In June 2018, he was also appointed a member of the Order of Australia for his work.

Tutt reinforces the fact that accountants frequently bring great value to philanthropic work. "A CPA is someone who has business acumen, a professional approach and an ethical grounding," he says.

Indeed, one of the most rewarding elements of his work with Diabetes NSW & ACT and Diabetes Australia has been providing financial support to an International Diabetes Federation program called Life for a Child, which has provided insulin to more than 17,000 impoverished children and other young people with type 1 diabetes in over 46 countries.

ABOUT DIABETES AUSTRALIA

Diabetes Australia is the national body for people affected by all types of diabetes and those at risk. Through leadership, prevention, management and research, the organisation is committed to reducing the impact of diabetes. In collaboration with state and territory diabetes organisations and assisting with the administration of the National Diabetes Services Scheme (NDSS), Diabetes Australia provides practical assistance, information and subsidised products to almost 1.1 million Australians diagnosed with diabetes.

To donate, visit: www.diabetesaustralia.com.au

Click here to read the entire article.



“I love seeing photos of the garden taken at various times, from a place filled with weeds, to a vacant plot, then a garden with raised beds and now one with a barn, rainwater harvesting and soon solar panels. It shows how far we’ve come ”.

JOEY KEE CPA

CULTIVATING COMMUNITY IN MALAYSIA

Joey Kee CPA is the driving force behind turning an overgrown space into a community-owned, edible garden.

When Kee heard a podcast in 2015 about an edible community garden in his suburb in Kuala Lumpur, he didn't realise the impact the moment would have on his life.

"I just thought I'd check it out as it was the first time I'd heard of such a place in TTDI [Taman Tun Dr Ismail], despite having lived [there] for more than 20 years," he recalls.

The garden Kee visited was overgrown with weeds. It was clear it wasn't being well maintained and he discovered that most of the members had moved on to other projects.

Kee organised a gotong-royong – a group of volunteers – to clean up the garden. "It was a bit of a struggle as there were only four of us and we didn't have any gardening and farming knowledge or experience," he says.

"We decided to head back home and obtain some skills through volunteering at other farms, reading online articles, watching YouTube videos related to gardening, and [cultivating] our own plants at home."

By early 2017, he was putting much of his energy and time into the garden.

"As a bigger collective with more consistent participants, we managed to clear it up and plant fruit trees and vegetables," Kee explains. He also established a committee of 10 and stepped in as treasurer.

Helpfully, the collective was supported by the local authority council's (DBKL) Agenda 21 department, "which aims to reduce carbon emissions, create sustainable development within local communities and utilise unused vacant lands", Kee outlines.

In addition to his work as treasurer, Kee manages the garden's Facebook page and Facebook group and acts as a liaison between the committee and external stakeholders, preparing presentation slides, proposals and reports.

The group has secured two grants totalling RM30,000 and signed a memorandum of understanding with DBKL, which gives it formal authority to operate the garden, and supports fundraising.

"We have to do most things manually – watering, tilling new beds, weeding, composting, grass cutting and harvesting – and we sell the produce during our weekend market at the garden."

ABOUT TTDI EDIBLE GARDEN

The community owned project is supported by residents in TTDI and neighbouring areas. The garden operates on an "adoption of a plot" basis, with each plot planted in and watered by the person who adopted it.

[Click here to read the entire article.](#)



“We need to break into new networks and get the message out there to accountants, auditors and finance professionals so we can show people what’s possible.”

MELVA MACAULAY ASA

AFiD: TAKING ACCOUNTING SKILLS AND PUTTING THEM TO VOLUNTEER USE

Nepal seemed like a world away from northern New South Wales, and that was part of its appeal for Melva Macaulay ASA. A love of travel and desire to broaden her accounting experience saw Macaulay step outside her comfort zone for two weeks over Christmas 2018 and volunteer for SMART, a non-government organisation (NGO) that aims to improve the social impact of government, charity and social enterprise initiatives in countries such as Nepal.

Nepal is a predominantly cash-based society, but SMART needed a transparent financial system to secure and satisfy international grant requirements. Macaulay set up the NGO with an Excel cashbook system adapted for its specific needs and trained the local staff on how to use it. In two weeks, they'd uploaded six months' worth of data.

"It was very challenging," Macaulay admits. "In developing countries there are obvious issues of infrastructure, running water, the electricity sometimes goes off and the computers they use are not quite the same as we use. Plus, they didn't have central heating and it was in the middle of winter. There was also a language barrier with a lot of the documentation written in Nepali language, but there were a lot of people there who really wanted to make it work."

ACCOUNTING FOR CHANGE

Macaulay discovered SMART through Accounting for International Development (AFiD), a UK-based social enterprise launched a decade ago by Neil Jennings.

Jennings had been working as an operations manager for an accountancy recruitment agency when he took a career break to volunteer in Africa. Working in a

small NGO set up by orphans and refugees of the 1994 Rwanda genocide to give vulnerable children access to education, Jennings could see the survival of their activities hung desperately in the balance due to faltering donor relationships and a lack of financial management knowledge.

He returned to the UK and recruited an accountant to replace him in Rwanda. This would later prove to be the origin of AFiD, which today is helping to alleviate poverty and inequality. AFiD has placed more than 1400 accountants and provided more than 250,000 hours of one-to-one support to more than 500 charities across 50 countries.

Those accountants have taken assignments ranging from two weeks to a year, sometimes longer, assisting international charities and grassroots NGOs in developing countries. This may include working with a street child centre, hospital or school, or on a conservation project or women's empowerment program or in a micro-financial institution.

BUILDING CAPABILITIES IN ACCOUNTING

Gregory Wiese FCPA enjoyed his first volunteering experience so much that he recently took on a second assignment.

Wiese's first volunteer trip through AFiD was to Laos in 2018, supporting a small non-profit known as GAPE (Global Association for People and the Environment), which aims to develop economies in remote villages.

Wiese says the people he worked with were smart and capable but using an accounting package written >

in a non-native language. They also wanted to talk to someone with experience outside of the country to help sharpen their skills.

In March 2019, Wiese took a second assignment to Cambodia to work with Krousar Yoeung, an NGO committed to developing early childhood education opportunities in remote areas. His task was to build the capacity of the organisation by enhancing its capabilities with accounting software.

Jennings says it's not uncommon for volunteers to return for three, four or even five different projects. AFiD aims to expand its network of volunteers.

"We need to break into new networks and get the message out there to accountants, auditors and finance professionals so we can show people what's

possible," he says. "We've been blessed with some fantastic people in 10 years, and it has been a good experience to meet these people and see what has happened in their lives after they have volunteered."

FURTHER RESOURCES

CPA Australia supports Accounting for International Development (AFiD) and its work and opportunities available to members worldwide.

CPA Australia members are entitled to complimentary professional indemnity (PI) cover when performing voluntary or pro bono accounting services in the community. Find out more.

[Click here to read the entire article.](#)



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