

Timehelp Program: Turning Spare Time into School Resources

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Abstract

Timehelp is an innovative community partnership model that turns spare time into school resources and connects our younger generation with our seniors. It came about through the vision of two not-for-profit organisations, Charities Aid Foundation and SEAL Force, and global aluminium giant Alcoa, who saw an opportunity to better utilise 'people resources' in building a strong and more vibrant community.

In just eight months since inception, over 1500 volunteer hours (AUD\$60,000 in value) have been contributed by Alcoa retirees and others seniors in the community to five state primary and secondary schools in Geelong region, Victoria. Those figures rise weekly, with 98 per cent of the Timehelp team sustaining their involvement. Tasks range from budget cooking for teenage mums, to floral art for kids without gardens, library assistance, one-to-one reading support, grounds maintenance and sharing of life experiences.

Timehelp is national and international best practice in its field because of:

- the structure and critical support provided to the seniors and schools involved. Two part-time Timehelp managers match school needs with the skill and knowledge of the volunteers and offer ongoing management to both parties. The volunteers undergo pre-placement training and police checks. A kit has been developed outlining the program procedures and responsibilities for both parties. All Timehelp members are supplied with a distinctive uniform, a regular newsletter and networking functions.
- the three-way link between a major company and its retirees, local schools, and the not-for-profit organisations providing the ongoing management
- ability to duplicate the model in any community anywhere in the world where there is a major business presence — that is our intention. A short documentary DVD has been produced.

Keywords

Volunteers, schools, retirees, corporate, partnership

Introduction

Each week in the Geelong region of Victoria, Australia, a team of retired and part-time workers head to six different primary and secondary schools where they turn their spare time into school resources.

Since 2004 more than 2000 volunteer hours have been contributed to local schools through the Timehelp program, with the statistics rising. There's a 98 per cent retention of volunteers after a twelve-month period with 100 per cent of the schools stating they are gaining excellent value from the program. The corporate supporter and its non-profit partners are in the process of duplicating the model at three other sites across Australia.



Timehelp volunteers Doreen and Bruce Mann helping out in the Leopold Primary School library

Through Timehelp the younger generation are connected with our seniors and visa versa. Our teachers have access to extra hands and minds to focus on kids that need extra help. The schools have enhanced learning content through specialised classes in activities such as Poetry, Floral Art, and Cooking. For the volunteers, the result is a new sense of self worth and value to the community, and better health through physical and mental activity.

This paper seeks to address who's behind Timehelp, what makes it work so well, what we have learnt on the way, how we measure our success, the plan for sustainability and how the model could be duplicated in other communities around the world.

Who's behind Timehelp?

Timehelp is a three-way partnership developed between Alcoa Australia Rolled Products and two Australian-based not-for-profit organisations, Charities Aid Foundation Australia and SEAL Force. It came about through a shared vision to better utilise 'people resources' in building a strong and more vibrant community.

Both Charities Aid Foundation and SEAL Force have complementary objectives; to facilitate partnerships between the community sector and business in order to achieve mutual strategic objectives.

The contribution to Timehelp by Alcoa Australia Rolled Products

- Access to current and prospective volunteers through the Alcoa retiree network
- Supply of Timehelp uniforms to all volunteers
- Coordinating and paying the costs of at least two social functions a year for all volunteers and participating schools
- Timehelp recognition certificates

- Alcoa Foundation seed funding of AUD\$27,000 to research and develop the first pilot of the program and subsequently AUD\$14,000 to expand it in Year 2
- Internal promotion of the program and model to other Alcoa sites in Australia and overseas to assist expansion
- Public endorsement of the program and introduction to other prospective corporate partners, e.g. Ford and Shell
- Active involvement in the program — bi-monthly meetings to discuss progress and outcomes and the program have been embraced and strongly supported by key leaders in Alcoa including the Managing Director
- Photographic record of the project — ongoing. This enables Charities Aid Foundation and SEAL Force to visually promote the program in a variety of mechanisms.
- Use of Alcoa meeting rooms to run pre-placement training program and other meetings.

The contribution to Timehelp by Charities Aid Foundation and SEAL Force

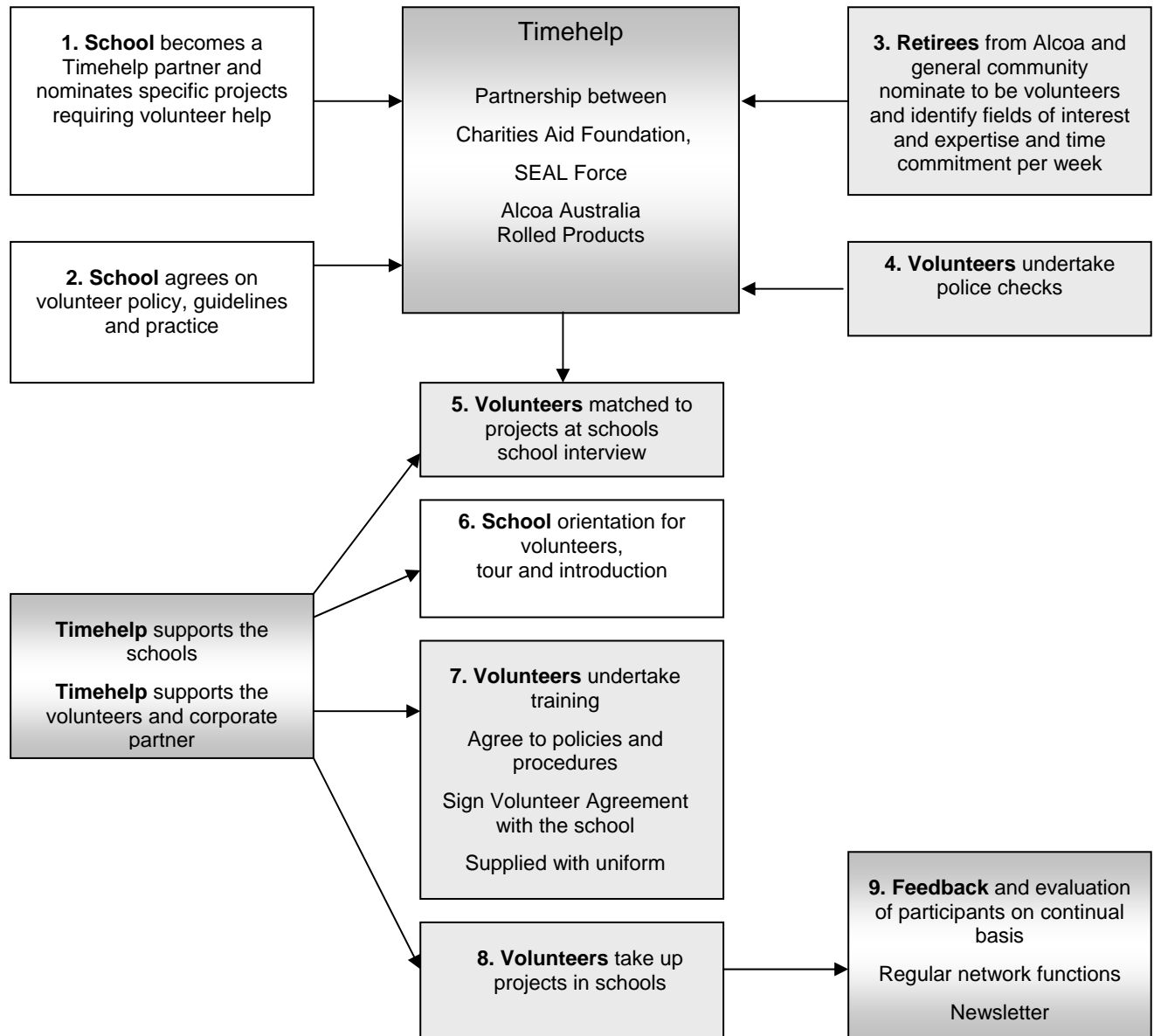
- Knowledge and expertise in managing volunteer programs
- Development of Volunteer and Schools Kit — outlining all relevant policies, procedures and responsibilities
- Management and implementation of the program, operational and financial — two part-time program managers — one from each organisation
- Annual evaluation and feedback surveys with volunteers and schools
- Sourcing and supporting new volunteers from broader community
- Schools liaison, coordinating training and police checks
- Comprehensive data base of volunteers, schools, and other stakeholders, e.g. government
- External communication and media liaison about the program — media releases, seniors' journals, stakeholder letters to detail program progress
- Introducing Timehelp to other prospective corporate and philanthropic partners
- Sharing the learnings of the model with other interested community organisations and councils
- Wrote, produced and directed a Timehelp promotional DVD
- Office, administration and reception facilities
- Design, content and distribution of a regular Timehelp newsletter.

Key success factors

Underpinning the success of Timehelp are four critical factors:

- 1) **A sound structure and management process is in place.** This involves matching, management and support of both the schools and the volunteers by two part-time Timehelp coordinators. They match school needs with the skill and knowledge of the volunteers and provide ongoing liaison. Volunteers undergo pre-placement training, police checks and school orientation. They also receive

a Timehelp Kit outlining the program procedures and responsibilities and are supplied with a distinctive uniform, a regular newsletter and invitations to networking functions.



- 2) **Role of the 'third party' as intermediary.** The Timehelp coordinators act as a bridge between the schools, volunteers and corporate partner. The schools have told Timehelp the attraction is the fact that they don't have to undertake all the administration, sourcing and management of the volunteers but they benefit from the resource. The company (Alcoa) recognises it does not have the staff, expertise or resources 'in house' to manage such an initiative, nor does it desire that responsibility or role. The combined expertise of SEAL Force and Charities Aid Foundation as the Timehelp facilitators and coordinators is welcomed by all parties and provides a tangible vehicle for the not-for-profits to demonstrate their mission and build their credibility.

3) **Stakeholder consultation throughout the development, implementation and review stage.**

Right from the very beginning Timehelp based its information, planning and activities on outcomes of discussions held with key stakeholders and international research into what works and what doesn't in successful volunteering. Collaborative meetings were held with school principals across the region. The schools played a key role in developing the volunteer kit and policies and procedures manual. At Alcoa, Timehelp consulted with the relative unions who then assisted in the communication with the retiree network. The retirees helped identify the type of skills they thought they could contribute, designed the Timehelp uniform and provided feedback on the kit. Regular feedback is obtained through personal house-calls and a quarterly newsletter. Other stakeholders such as government and education based not-for-profit organisations are consulted on a regular basis to ensure there is no 'reinventing the wheel' and to maintain productive dialogue and sharing of ideas.

4) **Strong relationship with a corporate partner.** Timehelp would not be in existence without the strong support and resourcing of Alcoa Australia Rolled Products and the Alcoa Foundation. In addition to the financial support, the most important contribution by Alcoa has been an existing pool of potential volunteers through the company's retiree network in Geelong. There has been a ripple effect created by the initial ten volunteers who took part in the pilot. They tell others, who engage others and so forth.

Key learnings

- a) Tap into an existing pool of potential volunteers through an industry network or the like
- b) Identify school needs first then match needs with skills and interests of volunteers
- c) Don't over-promise to schools. Once the word is out that volunteer assistance is available, your program becomes instantaneously popular. In order to deliver a quality service, develop strong relationships with schools and ensure there were enough volunteers to service them, Timehelp initially worked with four schools and 12 volunteers in the pilot phase and has since extended that to six schools and 22 volunteers in the region. Attracting volunteers is the number one challenge.
- d) Provide a distinctive uniform so there is a collective image of the program in the community and to easily identify the volunteers in the schools. Some days there may be only one volunteer in a school and other days a team. In both cases parents, teachers and the school community know Timehelp is present and the volunteer feels proud to have a clear identity.
- e) Recognise and reward volunteer efforts. We have a regular newsletter, host Timehelp lunches and annually award certificates of contribution to our members. We have also produced a corporate DVD on the program which showcases some of the volunteers at work.

- f) Volunteers, schools and companies like structure around volunteer programs. It mitigates risk, ensures good governance and procedures are in place and promotes a culture of meaningful and innovative community investment.
- g) Realistically cost all the activities, time and resources needed to make a volunteer program successful. Currently each volunteer costs Timehelp approximately AUD\$1000 to match and manage over a twelve-month period. Considering the average hours contributed by one volunteer a year is 120 hours a year at AUD\$30 an hour, equalling AUD\$3600, the investment is a sound one. Added to that is the fact that each year the volunteer continues his or her activity at the school, the dollar value increases but the initial investment stays the same. This financial output does not take into consideration the economic value of the health and wellbeing of the volunteer or the community goodwill derived for Alcoa.
- h) Ask the classroom teacher to identify the specific project/objective of the volunteers' activity in the classroom prior to commencement. The volunteer needs to know how his/her contribution will make a difference. It's also good practice for the teacher to consider the measure of volunteer success.
- i) Some volunteers want to make a contribution to the school but don't necessarily want to do that through contact with students. For example a number of Timehelp volunteers help by maintaining the school gardens and grounds, erecting new playgrounds or helping file books in the library.
- j) Some volunteers want to try a variety of volunteering roles within their matched school so flexibility where possible is encouraged
- k) Document as much of the volunteer management process, time contribution and financial management as possible so that the model is down on paper for ease of duplication and dissemination
- l) The production of a twelve-minute DVD showcasing the project and the volunteers at work has proved to be one of the best investments and decisions made by Timehelp and Alcoa. It has been shown at a number of presentations and forums, and is regularly used by Alcoa, Charities Aid Foundation and SEAL Force to promote the program and interest new supporters. The cost of the DVD was just over AUD\$6000.
- m) Volunteers usually want to contribute to schools located close to their homes. It's a good idea to get a sense of the geographic location of the bulk of the volunteers prior to identifying partnering schools. We learnt the hard way and some schools have only received help from one or two volunteers while others have a team of eight.

Measuring our success

Each year we evaluate three aspects of the program: outcomes for the schools; outcomes for the volunteers; and outcomes for the strategic partners (Alcoa, CAF and SEAL Force). We use a variety of mechanisms to measure our success including annual written feedback surveys, anecdotal feedback, group consultation at Timehelp functions and stakeholder meetings. We set annual volunteer targets and program objectives and report on our performance through our newsletter.

1. *Outcomes to date for the schools*

- **Improved school resourcing**

Over 2000 volunteer hours have been contributed to six schools through Timehelp to date.

“We get all the benefits without doing the hard work and it would be pretty impossible for us to manage otherwise.” (Glenn Brown, Principal, Leopold Primary School)

“Lance (volunteer) has made a huge difference to us at Newcomb Secondary College. He has freed us up to do things with the students that we just wouldn’t normally have a chance to do.” (Jenny Atkinson, Newcomb Secondary College)

“We really enjoy having the volunteers in our classrooms. They’re able to provide some really valuable assistance to our teachers and we don’t underestimate that.” (Chris King, Corio Bay Senior College)

- **New skills and knowledge for students**

Timehelp volunteers provide a range of skills and knowledge from literacy and numeracy support, one-to-one mentoring, creative classes like floral art and poetry, teaching gardening and environmental skills and providing support for outdoor physical activities like swimming and sailing.

“We’ve got one volunteer that works with some young parents showing them how to prepare low-budget meals and one other volunteer who assists Year 11’s in an English class.” (Chris King, Corio Bay Senior College)

- **New social interaction for students with older people**

“It’s fantastic for us to have older people for our children to interact with.” (Vicki Renick, Principal, Grovedale Primary School)

“The age of these volunteers is just brilliant. The reality is some of these kids don’t know this generation. The stories that Angus tells are stories they would read about in books, like his tales about the war. These kids have no idea about that kind of life.” (Sally Sudweekes, Rosewall Primary School)

- **Sustained volunteer assistance — 98 per cent retention rate**

“It’s always been a goal to have people actively involved in the school from the community, but getting access to those people, knowing where they are and then being able to prepare them

and screen them is a really important function.” (Glenn Brown, Principal, Leopold Primary School)

- **New curriculum enhancing initiatives**

For example, cooking on a budget classes for young mothers attending Corio Bay Senior College, Floral art classes for disadvantaged students at Rosewall Primary School.

“Timehelp allows us to present a classroom program that we wouldn’t have the budget to do.” (Lorraine Armstrong, Parent support worker, Corio Bay Senior College)

- **Collaborative input into the development of a program with national and international scope to deliver real social change in education.** Four school principals and four teachers were involved in the initial development of the program, providing critical input into the volunteer kit, contracts, and program structure.

- **Positive links with local business and the broader community**

“It really gives an added dimension to our community profile and enables us to spread the good word about what a fantastic school we have here. “ (Vicki Renick, Principal, Grovedale Primary School)

“We’ve always wanted to develop a closer relationship with industry in our area, but struggled with making that connection.” (Alan Davis, Principal, Newcomb Secondary College)

2. **Outcomes to date for the volunteers**

- **Physical wellbeing**



Peter Rankin, Timehelp volunteer

“Since retiring I wandered what I was going to do with myself. When this opportunity came along I thought it was a good chance to get away from the house and give me exercise at the same time.” (Peter Rankin, volunteer)

“I get a lot of satisfaction from it, it’s great and it’s keeping me fit, I still feel like a Mallee bull.” (Jim Duffield, volunteer)

- **Emotional wellbeing**

“It’s just a really good thing to do. It gives me a lot of sense of pleasure and satisfaction to know you’ve helped”. (Lance Matthews, volunteer)

“You feel as though you’re helping somebody as well as getting a great benefit for yourself and the children are just lovely to be around.” (Jill Thomas, volunteer)

- **Social wellbeing**

“I always feel very welcome when I come to Rosewall Primary to work with the young kids doing flower arranging. Timehelp has encouraged me to continue doing something I’ve been doing for 30 years and I thoroughly enjoy it.” (Vera Begg, volunteer)

“I live about 50 metres from the school and kids being what they are sometimes used to come past my place and snap a few flowers off but since starting with Timehelp they say g’day and leave my flowers alone.” (Jake Dertien, volunteer)

- **New sense of purpose and self worth**

“The best part of all, is introducing children between the ages of 5 to 16 to the pleasures of reading, fantasy and understanding the world at large and the people in it, so understanding them selves a little better.” (Rhonda Whitehead, volunteer)

“I get quite a kick of talking to the young people and I also hope I can help them understand a little more about life really.” (Angus Begg, volunteer)

- **New sense of community connection**

“I think it’s a good thing a person of my age can put something of value back into the community.” (Keith Newton, volunteer)

“I think I’ve gained a lot as far as getting to know more people around the area. Kids see you up the street and give you a smile and say g’day and parents say hi, I’ve seen you up at the school.” (Sid Thomas, volunteer)

“The good thing about what I do is it gives you a sense of contributing back into the community. I feel very appreciated by the people at the school” (Lance Matthews, volunteer)

3. Outcomes for the broader community

- **Engaged, active seniors**

Australia’s over-65 population is going to double in the next 40 years and the healthcare system will be hardest hit. Timehelp provides a vehicle to help reduce this economic and social burden. Timehelp provides early intervention against depression through social and physical activity.

- **Intergenerational social links**

Timehelp is establishing new connections between the older generation and young people. In some of our partnering schools, students have no relationships with adults who are over the age of 40.

4. Outcomes for the strategic partners

Alcoa Australia Rolled Products

“Timehelp is a perfect bridge between our business and the community and has brought a new dimension to our social programs. It brings our values to life, provides a human face to the company and a continuing source of help for our local schools. It also enables our retirees to keep connected to Alcoa.” (Mike McKinstry, Managing Director, Alcoa Australia Rolled Products)

- **Sustainable positive community impact** — Delivering way beyond the financial investment this partnership has enabled Alcoa and Alcoa ARP to make a lasting positive impact on our community through capacity building. Taken from a purely financial viewpoint, Timehelp represents a 200 per cent return on initial investment if one compares the dollars contributed and the volunteer hours delivered. The volunteers continue their involvement long after the initial matching has taken place, enabling the Timehelp managers to enlist the support of new volunteers on a continual basis. The volunteers also have new attitudes, knowledge and community understanding at a time when they are faced with a substantial life change in retirement.
- **Enhanced citizenship reputation** — Alcoa and Alcoa ARP has received excellent anecdotal feedback in support of the program from senior government and education representatives, local councillors and leaders of Geelong’s not for profit sector reinforcing a positive citizenship reputation. All six partnering schools acknowledged Timehelp across their school communities including Alcoa’s valuable contribution. Positive media coverage and profiles have delivered an increased profile for Timehelp, Alcoa and Alcoa ARP.
- **Reinforces Alcoa’s values** — Every aspect of the Timehelp program reinforces Alcoa’s core values, especially valuing people and operating with integrity
- **Communication links with multiple stakeholders** — A significant number of groups are unified through the positive outcomes of the Timehelp program including six local schools, their leaders, teachers, parents and students, representatives of two leading not-for-profits; Charities Aid Foundation and SEAL Force, education ministers and advisers, representatives of peak education and retiree organisations, and continued relationships with Alcoa. Over 50 copies of the Timehelp DVD have been distributed to stakeholders and other community partners.
- **Corporate community leadership** — By co-founding the unique Timehelp model and encouraging and helping Charities Aid Foundation and SEAL Force to replicate it with other communities and companies, Alcoa and Alcoa ARP have secured a leadership position in corporate volunteer programs.

- **Heightens current and past employee morale** and sense of purpose, which leads to the company being an employer of choice.

Outcomes for Charities Aid Foundation and SEAL Force

“Timehelp has enabled us to clearly demonstrate our organizations missions and social goals. We have been conduits and facilitators of positive social change by combining our skills, knowledge and expertise and that of the volunteers. It’s also enabled us to develop a meaningful and lasting relationship with a major business and inspire others to follow.” (John Winkett, Charities Aid Foundation & Lisa Kingman, SEAL Force)

- Flexible community volunteering model developed — Three other companies and two councils have expressed interest in duplicating the model and forming their own Timehelp teams to assist local schools
- Increased credibility and enhanced reputation through the ongoing success of the model
- Manifestation of our organisations mission and social objectives
- New funds and resources to bring a long-held vision to life — matching retirees with schools
- New community capacity building model to show prospective partners and stakeholders
- Meaningful relationship with one of Australia’s largest corporations
- Ability to enact and sustain real social change
- Cost effective and flexible model that can be duplicated almost anywhere the world
- Provides us with a leadership position in the community sector which in turn results in enquiries from other not-for-profit organisations
- Tangible visual resource (Timehelp DVD) to share with interested parties and at conferences around the world
- Access to new networks through Alcoa, e.g. government ministers, other Alcoa sites, philanthropic foundation leaders
- New knowledge and expertise about what works and what does not work in corporate volunteer programs
- Demonstrated successful collaboration between two not-for-profit organisations — combining best assets, knowledge and expertise to achieve great outcomes.

Sustainability and duplicating the model

The Timehelp model is cost effective. For an initial investment of AUD\$27,000 then a second grant of AUD\$14,000 (total financial investment to date is AUD\$31,000) the program has been designed, trialled and documented, its delivered more than AUD\$60,000 worth of volunteer hours to the schools, significant economic benefits in terms of the health and wellbeing of our seniors and produced a model than can be duplicated almost anywhere else in the world given the right inputs.

Once Timehelp volunteers are matched to a school, the time resource requirement for ongoing support is relatively low and yet the outcomes for the school continue to flow, sustaining the impact beyond the initial investment.

Our vision for Timehelp in the future is for companies to embrace the model and form their own Timehelp volunteer teams all over the world. This could occur by paying Timehelp an annual membership fee for a predetermined number of volunteer matches or by commissioning the intellectual property of the model to duplicate it through the company's own networks. We are currently discussing the sustainability of the program with government and exploring the idea of a national Timehelp coordinator to respond to interest from companies, schools and others such as local municipal councils and philanthropic foundations.

Timehelp welcomes the opportunity to discuss the model with any community or company that may be interested. Timehelp can act on a consulting basis or manage the program for companies via its global networks. The model has been thoroughly documented and can easily be adapted to different communities. Turning spare time into school and community resources is now a reality.

For more information

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