

CILT'S Volunteer Vibes

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History of “Volunteer Centres” in Canada

What is a Volunteer Centre?

Volunteer Centres are non-profit organizations or groups dedicated to fostering and developing volunteerism in the community as a whole. While other organizations contribute to sustaining our national heritage of volunteering through their programs and outreach, Volunteer Centres serve the broadest membership: including volunteers and organizations/volunteer-involving organizations. Volunteer Centres reach across the non-profit and public sectors to include organizations working in human and social services, health care, education, the arts and recreation - regardless of their source of funding.

Today there are more than [200 Volunteer Centres in Canada](#), each providing common services as well as a unique mix of programs to fit the needs of the community.

Historical overview:

The first Volunteer Centre was established in 1937 in Montréal to respond to the need for volunteers during the Second World War. During the 1960s and 1970s, Volunteer Centres were established in many urban areas across the country to promote and support effective volunteering.

Throughout the last 30 years, Volunteer Centres have developed significant expertise in the area of volunteerism through the development of programs, research, and training. The centres are committed to resolving issues influencing the way people volunteer in Canada by reducing the barriers and promoting safe and meaningful volunteer opportunities. Volunteer Centres provide active leadership in areas such as youth volunteerism, risk management, corporate volunteerism, mandatory volunteerism, community service orders, educational campaigns, and many more.

Volunteer Centres in Canada - core services:

Volunteer Centres exist primarily to foster and develop volunteerism in the community as a whole. Volunteer Centres engage in four general kinds of activities:

(a) Promoting volunteerism and raising awareness of the power of service

Volunteer Centres raise awareness of the power of service, encourage people to volunteer, provide information about volunteerism and recognize the contribution of volunteers. They strive to communicate the tremendous benefits found in volunteering and they inform the public about the impact volunteers have on the community. They increase awareness on the challenges volunteers face and on the need to better support their work through financial, legislative and social policies. Some examples of promotional efforts led by Volunteer Centres include celebrating National Volunteer Week, Global Youth Service Day, International Day of the Volunteer (December 5th) and coordinating local events.

(b) Building capacity for effective local volunteering through management consulting on volunteer programs and training of volunteers and managers of volunteer resources

Volunteer Centres help voluntary sector organizations, other volunteer-involving groups, and individuals that work with volunteers, do a better job recruiting, managing and retaining volunteers. Through training and consultation, they help managers of volunteers and volunteers perform their jobs more effectively. Working with community agencies, Volunteer Centres can determine training priorities, consulting or organizational/board development needs.

An effective volunteer program must be structured to protect the interests of the agency, volunteer and client. This requires stringent policies and diligent efforts to ensure that volunteers are matched, supervised, and involved appropriately. Volunteer Centres work with the community agencies to share examples of best practices both locally and from other regions so as to streamline the process while emphasizing protection.

(c) Providing leadership and advocacy on issues relating to volunteerism and volunteer programs

Volunteer Centres serve as a convener for the community and a catalyst for action. They work through local partnerships and collaborations with various groups and organizations, government, schools, and community leaders to identify needs and mobilize volunteer response. They safeguard the needs of

volunteers and community agencies by supporting legislation and policy initiatives on such issues as screening volunteers and integrating people with disabilities as volunteers. Through their provincial and national affiliations (such as with Volunteer Canada), Volunteer Centres communicate the needs of volunteers to the top levels of government. Some examples of advocacy efforts include speaking on behalf of volunteers, convening or participating on committees, and advising volunteers of community needs.

(d) Connecting people with opportunities to serve through recruitment and referral of volunteers to community agencies

Volunteer Centres provide people with easy access to a wide variety of opportunities to connect to their community through service. Some examples include targeting programs for special populations, offering recruitment and referral services, and managing direct services involving volunteers. Acting as a clearinghouse, Volunteer Centres can assist volunteers and agencies in connecting with one another.

Traditionally, Volunteer Centre referral counsellors have delivered the referral services, but increasingly Volunteer Centres are reaching out by providing satellite offices, developing online databases that are accessible through libraries, and/or posting information on the Internet.

What can a volunteer centre do for you?

Volunteer centres provide services for individuals and organizations who seek information on volunteering. Call your [closest volunteer centre](#) for more information.

Myths About Volunteers

(1) Volunteers are different from people in an actual work setting.

Volunteers are often motivated by different factors than are employees, so they generally must be managed differently than paid workers. However, the leader must allow individuals, whether volunteer or paid, to use their individual talents and skills in becoming a part of the organization. The leader must help volunteers become good workers, even if they are not on a payroll.

(2) A leader or advisor should not expect too much from volunteers.

On the contrary, leaders and advisors have every right to expect a great deal from volunteers. However, these expectations cannot be kept a secret from members. They must be communicated clearly and directly, and such communication should be repeated when appropriate.

(3) Volunteers should not expect too much from their leader.

While it is true that volunteers should not have unreasonable expectations, certain expectations are very appropriate. One reasonable expectation of a leader is that she or he will give appropriate feedback, monitor performance and respond appropriately to volunteers' performance. Leaders may inform volunteers of what they may expect from the leadership, solicit expectations from the membership, and/or negotiate mutual expectations. A volunteer agreement is an effective mechanism to formalize these expectations.

(4) Volunteers on student program boards and committees are not important enough to worry about firing.

Not so! In addition to the value of program boards and committees as laboratories for applied learning, these organizations generally spend public funds (student activity fees). Therefore, accountability becomes a very real concern for leaders and advisors. The effective functioning of group members should indeed be a very important objective.

Volunteers are too valuable to be fired.

Although it is true that volunteers are the lifeblood of our organizations, it is precisely because they are so valuable that leaders or advisors should not allow volunteers to hurt organizations or other members through irresponsible behavior. If these persons cannot change, or if the leader is unable to help them become positive contributors to the organization, then they probably should be removed from it.

Source: Sara Boatman, "How to Fire a Volunteer," Student Activities Programming, March, 1981.

Key Statistics About Canadian Volunteers

© 2004 Canadian Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating (CSGVP)
www.givingandvolunteering.ca

(24,164 Canadians were surveyed; volunteering is defined as doing activities without pay on behalf of a group or organization, and includes mandatory community service.)

- **11.8 million Canadians volunteered** which represents 45% of the population;
- Average number of hours were **168 hours**;
- 66% of Canadians participated by belonging to an organization, group or association;

- **Virtually every Canadian (96%) engages in at least one form of social support** (i.e. giving, volunteering, direct helping, participating as a member in an organization);
- **14% of Canadians provide 39% of all volunteer hours;**
- **Teenagers (aged 15 to 19) (65%)** are more likely than those in any other age group to volunteer;
- 30% of those with annual household incomes of less than \$20,000 compared to 60% of those with incomes of \$100,000 or more volunteered;
- **11% of Canadians (the 25% of volunteers contributing 180 hours or more) provided 77% of volunteer hours;**
- Those with school-aged children (6 to 17 years) were most likely to volunteer (59% of those with only school aged children volunteered, while 53% of those with both pre-school and school-aged children volunteered);
- **8% used the Internet to find volunteer opportunities;**
- **83% of Canadians helped someone directly**, rather than volunteering through an organization
- **Top 3 reasons to volunteer:** make a contribution, use skills and experience and being affected by the cause of the organization;
- **Volunteers who receive support from their employer volunteer significantly more time** (166 hours, on average than those who do not receive employer support (122 hours).

Mandatory Volunteerism

There is a mixed reaction to mandatory volunteerism by adults and students. Some people feel that making someone volunteer defies the spirit of volunteering. Other people position their argument for mandatory (voluntold) volunteering by stating that some youth have never been introduced to the rewards of volunteering and this educational method does just that. The following article is about mandatory volunteerism from a student's perspective.

Mandatory Volunteering: A Student's Perspective

By Vicki Xu, Student

When faced with the CAS (creative/action/service) program at the beginning of Grade 11, many students start with the same thoughts: fifty hours? Impossible! They begin to scramble around, scooping up whatever volunteer positions they can find, complaining along the way. Are these mandatory service hours necessary? Are they forcing high school students to do too much extracurricular work?

The spirit of volunteering is to give up your time freely to help others. It seems completely contradictory to force students into something that is meant to be given out of the goodness of their hearts.

However, mandatory volunteering is actually a wonderful part of high school that all students benefit from, no matter how much they may complain. It teaches them to take the initiative to find a volunteer position and then to manage their schedules to fit in time each week. It develops dedication to a task, as well as responsibility. It coaches a friendly attitude and better interactions with others.

Although many students may not realize it, volunteering is the start of the development of life skills that will be needed not only in the workplace but in life. It gets many students out of their houses, off computers, away from televisions, and into the real world where not only are they helping others and they are learning new things.

Mandatory volunteering also helps fill in the spaces where volunteering is needed. Without mandatory programs, places such as the Odysium, hospitals, local festivals, and charity events would all be much emptier. Our society needs these volunteers, and if awarding school credit ensures that a demand is met, it is a worthy sacrifice.

I first began to volunteer at the beginning of my Grade 10 year. I thought volunteering earlier than required was a way to fill up the CAS hours for the International Baccalaureate program. At the University of Alberta Hospital library, I spent four hours a week helping patients, delivering magazines, and organizing books. After less than four months I was done the fifty required hours that were supposed to be completed in two years, yet I continued to volunteer. Even after I decided not to attain my IB diploma, rendering my CAS hours useless, I still continued to volunteer.

I discovered a great joy from helping patients; providing them with someone to talk to, and lighting a smile on their faces. Breaking the monotony of their lives was infinitely more important than the two or three hours taken out of my homework time. Without the mandatory CAS program, I would not have realized the rewards of volunteering.

By giving students that little extra push to volunteer, mandatory volunteering creates a world of good. It provides students with needed life skills, fills the void in volunteering programs, and allows students to discover the joys of volunteering that most would not realize.

Disability Awareness Corner

Gateway to Screening: Assessing the Needs of Women with Mobility Disabilities

by Catherine Girard and Nancy Barry

My name is Catherine Girard. I am a second year Social Service Worker student at George Brown College, and am currently completing a volunteer placement at the Centre for Independent Living in Toronto. It is my pleasure to introduce to you, on behalf of CILT, the Gateway to Screening project.

I am glad to have been given the opportunity to be a part of the planning stages for this project. Considering the fact that I am a young woman living with a mobility disability, and have lost my mother to a battle against breast cancer, I am confident that I will be able to contribute some valuable information and personal experience to this wonderful and much needed project.

The goal of this project is to determine the cancer screening needs of women with mobility disabilities, particularly screening for breast, colorectal and cervical cancers, and determine the gaps and barriers associated with accessing these services. As we all know, cancer takes the lives of more people in Canada than strokes, respiratory disease, pneumonia, diabetes, liver diseases and HIV/AIDS combined.

Prevention and early detection and screening are seen as ideal areas of intervention in the cancer control continuum. For example, a high quality organized cervical screening program with high rates of participation can reduce new cases of cervical cancer, and deaths from it by 80-90% compared with no screening; breast screening can find cancers when they are still small and can respond better to treatment and screening for colorectal cancer is an effective way of reducing colorectal cancer. Ontario's rate of new colorectal cancer cases is among the highest in the world.

For women with disabilities access to screening and support has been a challenge:

- Women with disabilities have the same biological risks as other women for developing all cancers. Unfortunately, barriers to effective cancer screening for disabled women include lack of knowledge among these women, neglect on the part of health-care providers, and physical access barriers (Welner, 1998). Together, these factors may delay diagnosis and treatment of many common malignancies. Women with disabilities, in particular those who are older, are less likely to receive regular pap tests and mammograms (Nosek & Howland, 1997).

- Although some of the barriers to cancer screening are structural, such as inaccessible examination tables, stirrups, and lack of appropriate examining instruments for impaired women, studies show that physicians sometimes fail to recommend any screening for women with disabilities (Nosek, Young, & Rintala, 1995).
- Some disabled women describe health-care providers as insensitive to and unaware of disability issues and the way they affect reproductive health (Nosek, Young, & Rintala, 1995).

The Centre for Independent Living along with its partners, the Canadian Cancer Society, the Marvella Koffler Breast Centre and the Faculty of Nursing, University of Toronto will conduct a qualitative needs assessment to identify the barriers faced by women with disabilities to access screening, existing services and identify specific gaps in service. The needs assessment will take place in two stages. In Phase I, researchers will interview representatives from the disabled women's community including ethno-racial women, lesbian and bi-sexual women, aboriginal women as well as women living on fixed incomes. Phase II will involve a key informant survey among service providers at specific cancer centers in the GTA to identify barriers are present when working with disability issues.

The intent of the assessment is to develop a series of recommendations to be shared with the key stakeholders involved in the delivery of screening services and to focus on implementing these recommendations. A working group on screening has been set up at CILT to act on and monitor the implementation of the recommendations, consisting of the partners of the project, as well other key contributors including the Anne Johnston Health Station and Education Wife Assault. It is our intent that the assessment will produce some new areas of knowledge which we can effectively transfer to key cancer control professionals that will benefit people with disabilities.

We are very excited about this project, and are currently in the process of creating the needs assessment and setting up some focus groups which will take place over the next six months. We will continue to provide you with project updates as they arise. Stay tuned for further details coming your way in the months ahead.

CILT News

Our Executive Director, Vic Willi, was in a car accident on June 24th. He has a few broken bones and is currently convalescing in hospital. In the meantime, Sandra Carpenter is the acting Executive Director. Please join us in wishing Vic a speedy recovery.