

CILT's Volunteer Vibes

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Volunteer Program Update

Please welcome Mohamed Azweem as our newest volunteer. He is a long time member of CILT, and has participated in a number of peer support activities. Mohamed concurrently volunteers at Birchmount Bluffs Neighbourhood Centre. He will be coming in twice a week to assist staff with various administrative tasks.

Ever Considered On-Line Volunteering?

If you have access to a computer and the Internet coupled with the right skills then you should consider volunteering online. There are many organizations that are tapping into this method. Your roles as online volunteer can range from giving free legal advice to NGOs in developing countries to building nonprofit websites.

Your strengths could be in programming knowledge, good writing skills, experience in project management, knowledge of another language, expertise in law or education or another profession, or simply the time to offer expert advice or answer email for the host organization. Online volunteering is perfect if you have limited time or no transportation, and also opens up exciting opportunities for volunteers with disabilities.

Online volunteers undertake a variety of assignments for organizations: translations, research, web design, data analysis, database construction, proposal writing, editing articles, online mentoring, publication design, moderating an online discussion group, or any other services that can be done through computer networks.

Online volunteering provides organizations with new volunteers, new and additional talent and skills, and a more diverse volunteer base. It also helps to promote organizations and their mission to a much broader audience.

Benefits of online volunteering

For individuals, there are many appeals to online volunteering. You learn about other countries, and learn about issues faced by the developing world. You can exercise skills you are learning in school or for your workplace. Online volunteering allows you to take on roles and responsibilities your professional work may not provide. It may allow an expatriate to reconnect with and provide help to his or her homeland. As an online volunteer you can provide service at whatever time of day is convenient, without having to change clothes, drive a car or ride a bus somewhere, look for a parking place or find a place to stay for the evening. Online volunteering offers you a really convenient way to make a difference.

For organizations, online volunteers have skills and expertise that these organizations may not have, or that they need to supplement the work of onsite volunteers. Online volunteers help organizations stretch their onsite resources even further and to serve more clients. These volunteers may have sophisticated hardware or software an organization serving a developing country lacks.

Online volunteering allows for the participation of people who find onsite volunteering difficult or impossible because of a disability, home obligation, transportation difficulties or work schedule; this in turn allows agencies to benefit from the additional talent and resources of more volunteers. Online volunteers don't require physical accommodations, and don't generate car exhausts or other pollutants as a result of their service!

Online volunteering is not meant as a replacement for face-to-face volunteering, and most individuals and organizations don't choose it over onsite service. Online volunteering also is not meant to take away paid positions at an organization. Online volunteering is meant to help build the capacity of staff at an organization, as well as those that the organization serves. Online volunteering is just another way for people from various walks of life, all over the world, to connect with each other and be part of the Global Village.

Are You Ready to Be an Online Volunteer?

Questions to Ask First: There are some questions you should consider before submitting your application to become an Online Volunteer. It is fairly easy to apply for an assignment, but you will want to make sure that you will be able to complete it to your and your host organization's satisfaction.

Do you have regular access to the Internet? Do you have your own email account? It is necessary to maintain regular communication with the organization

you are volunteering with. You should be able to answer your email quickly, which means within 48 hours or 2 business days after receipt.

Are you comfortable working on your own? Are you self-motivated? You will have a great degree of flexibility in the use of the time you will be spending on your work. Such independence is very comfortable to some, but for others it is difficult to pull themselves up to work. Make sure that you are well able to set your own schedule, because there will only be occasional supervision.

Can you stick to deadlines? Your host organization is counting on you to finish your tasks on time. Your communication may be virtual, but your tasks and assigned deadlines are not.

Is this a suitable time for you to apply for a volunteering project? You should be confident that you can set enough time aside for your online volunteering assignment. If you are feeling overwhelmed by other responsibilities, like your job or coming exams, or you have/want to concentrate on family obligations or other personal issues at the moment - then perhaps you had better postpone your involvement.

Are you sure you are capable of producing a high-quality result on your online volunteering assignment? Considering both your skills and time availability, do you feel confident that you can carry out your assignment in such a way that you meet the needs of your host organization? Otherwise you will not help but cause inconvenience. Be honest with yourself about your capabilities. For you and your host organization's sake, do not over-commit for a project.

Are you comfortable working with people who might be from totally different backgrounds and different sets of values than your own? Organizations posting online volunteering assignments on our service are located all over the globe, and you can access our Web site from anywhere in the world. Be aware that your contribution to a project may express a different work style and way of thinking than prevalent in your host organization. Do not be upset if your great ideas are not approved right away. Frank communication is essential so that different backgrounds are an asset rather than an obstacle.

Give some thought to your expectations as well as the host's in relation to your Online Volunteer project. What will be your benefits? What should/can the organization expect from you? Answering these questions for yourself will help you identify the most appropriate assignment for you.

What Qualities Make For A Good Online Volunteer?

- Excellent written communication skills
- Excellent attention to detail, particularly when following written directions
- Commitment to answer e-mails quickly
- Commitment to stay with a project through to its completion, and to set a schedule for doing so
- Enjoyment of working on independently, with just occasional supervision
- Self-motivation
- Establishing trust from the agency quickly, by finishing assignments on time and reporting in regularly
- Desire to learn and willingness to be flexible about ideas and methods
- Good at self-pacing; gives her/his self plenty of time to work on an assignment
- Clear definition of what he or she wants out of online volunteering
- Puts desired goals of the agency or volunteer manager at the forefront when undertaking and completing projects.

How to Choose the Right Online Volunteering Assignment

A key to success in Online Volunteering is in choosing the assignments that are appropriate to your skills, interests and availability.

Use your answers to these questions to guide you in choosing organizations and assignments:

1. Why do you want to volunteer, in general?
2. What do you hope to gain and give by volunteering?
3. What kind of organization(s) or programs do you want to help?
4. What sort of services and assistance would you like to provide -- building a web site for an organization, doing online research, mentoring a young person via the Internet, visiting virtually with someone who is home bound?
5. Do you want to volunteer for something that uses the skills you apply in your paid work or at school, or do you want to do something completely different?

6. What types of things are you good at (and like to do)? These can be professional skills or even hobbies and recreational talents. Almost every type of skill is needed somewhere.
7. What DON'T you want to do as a volunteer?
8. What organizations have you volunteered with before, on or offline? What did you like and dislike about those experiences?
9. What is your availability for assignments? (do you want to work during a set time of day? for a certain amount of days, weeks, or months?)

How to Become an Online Volunteer

Online volunteers undertake a variety of assignments for organizations through our Online Volunteering service: translations, research, web design, data analysis, database construction, proposal writing, writing articles, online mentoring, publication design, moderating a discussion group, or any other services that can be done through the Internet.

Online Volunteering may sound so easy that, often, people sign up for assignments before considering the very real time and commitment that is needed by the organization recruiting volunteers. These steps are designed to help you get a sense of what it's like to work in an online environment and identify your expectations before you sign up for your first online volunteering assignment:

1. **Make sure you are ready to volunteer online.** If you have the enthusiasm and interest to become an online volunteer, then the next step is to make sure you are ready to volunteer online. This self-evaluation will help you make that determination.
2. **Evaluate your interests and what you want out of online volunteering.** You will need to think about what kinds of organizations and assignments you would be right for.
3. **Search and sign up for assignments that meet your interests.** After you have completed the first two steps, you are ready to sign up for an Online Volunteering assignment. Search through the opportunities, either based on the types of assignments or the types of organizations. You may need to do many different kinds of searches, narrowing or expanding your search many times so that you can find a range of opportunities to apply for.
4. **Send your application.** There is an online application form linked to each individual assignment description. When you try to sign up for your very first assignment, if you are not yet a registered member of our Online Volunteering service, you will be automatically led through the registration process.

5. Your completed application will automatically be sent to the organization that you would like to volunteer with. The organization then decides which applicants they will accept as their online volunteers. The UN Volunteers program will not review your application, but will save your information for statistical and evaluative purposes.
6. **Wait for a response from the organization you applied with.**
If you sign up for an assignment and don't hear back soon from the agency, remember: Online Volunteering is very, very new to most organizations, and many are still getting used to working with online volunteers. Please be patient. In your member page within our service, the assignments you applied for are automatically listed. If, after a few weeks, you have not heard from an organization you wanted to help, email the agency directly to say that you are still interested in volunteering online with the organization.

CILT News

Gateway to Cancer Screening: A Participatory Needs Assessment of Women with Mobility Disabilities

How we got started

The Centre for Independent Living in Toronto, (CILT) recognized the need to increase the level of awareness of screening for breast, cervical and colorectal screening among disabled women in the Toronto area. Partnerships were then developed with Mount Sinai Hospital and Canadian Cancer Society in order to write a proposal and seek funding.

Funding and support

The project is funded and supported by the Canadian Cancer Society, in particular, the Diversity & Cancer Control teams. They provide in-kind for the project, and ensure that the project reflects the diversity that exists in Toronto.

Recommendations from the research will be will be carried forward in a meaningful and sustainable way.

Who are the team partners in this project?

- Centre for Independent Living Toronto (CILT) Inc.
- Mount Sinai Hospital, Marvella Koffler Breast Centre
- Canadian Cancer Society

- University of Toronto, Faculty of Nursing

Also on our Advisory Group:

- Ismaili Cancer Support Network
- Anne Johnston Health Station
- Springtide Resources (formerly Education Wife Assault)

What is the Gateways Project?

The Gateways Project is a community-based participatory project that was carried out in the form of a qualitative needs assessment. We aimed to explore the experiences and needs of women with mobility disabilities when they access breast, cervical and colorectal cancer screening.

Background: Cancer and Screening

Early detection and screening are seen as ideal areas of intervention in the cancer control continuum. For women with disabilities, access to screening and support has been a challenge due to multiple barriers:

- Women with disabilities have the same biological risks as other women for developing all cancers.
- These barriers include lack of knowledge among these women, neglect on the part of health care providers, and physical access barriers (Welner; 1998).
- Women with disabilities, in particular those who are older, are less likely to receive regular Pap tests and mammograms (Nosek & Howland, 1997).

Diversity:

- Previous research has been conducted examining the barriers women with disabilities face in accessing preventative cancer screening; most of the research has been conducted outside of Canada.
- No existing research has explicitly examined the experiences of disabled women from a Toronto perspective.
- One of the aspects that makes Toronto unique is our demographic diversity.

Intersectionality:

A central aspect of this project is examining the 'intersectionality' of identities and exploring how intersecting identities impact a woman's experience with screening processes; for example, a Deaf lesbian mother from a Metis heritage who has multiple disabilities.

Recruitment and Demographics:

The research team outreached to the various communities highlighted above through various mediums, including sending recruitment flyers to a wide variety of disability organizations, as well as those serving women from the lesbian, bisexual, trans-gendered, trans-sexual, ethno-racial and aboriginal communities. Through partner organizations including the Centre for Independent Living Toronto, the Anne Johnston Health Station, Springtide Resources and the Ismaili Cancer Group, among others, a wide recruitment was conducted through newsletter articles, website postings, individual telephone calls, circulation of outreach flyers and word-of-mouth. All women interested in participating as a focus group participant were asked to contact the Project Coordinator for more information.

What is a Qualitative Needs Assessment?

A Needs Assessment is an exploration of the way things are and the way that they should be. In qualitative needs assessments, the aim is to gain personal insight from individuals or groups as to the nature and impact of a particular situation (Kaufman, R & Fenwick, W. Needs Assessment: Concept and Application, Educational Technology Publications, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1979).

Initially, the Gateways Project working group considered taking the qualitative description research approach. Historically, researchers did not include members from the disability community in their work. The project team strongly believed in inclusion and consensus-based decision making at each stage of the project. We also wanted an action component, which therefore moved us to Participatory Action Methodology.

What is Participation Action Research?

The emphasis is on relinquishing control, learning through mutual interaction between researchers and participants, and giving voice to those who would not otherwise be heard (Speciale & Carpenter, 2000, p. 329).

We chose this method of research because it included participation and most importantly, an action component. The action component is where we take the knowledge from the focus group participants and transfer it to cancer screening organizations, raising awareness among service providers that could possibly lead to informed changes in practice. Focus group participants would also feel empowered through shared discussion and the fact that their voices were being heard and listened to. It was decided by the research team that for this particular study, the Gateways Project, focus groups would be the best way to collect data with peer facilitators asking the questions, because focus groups allow

participants to build on each other's ideas that may not be obtained in a one-to-one interview.

Approval was obtained by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Toronto, for consent forms, letters of invitation to organizations who provided support to women with mobility disabilities, recruitment flyers and research protocol.

Community Outreach:

We deliberately attempted to hear from women from diverse communities, including women of colour, lesbian, bisexual, trans-gendered and trans-sexual communities, in order to truly reflect the diversity that exists in Toronto and make the resulting recommendations relevant to as many people in Toronto as possible.

Prior research on women with disabilities has implicitly assumed that either all women with disabilities are the same, or that disability is the singular central aspect of these women's lives.

Women with disabilities come from diverse sociocultural demographics, and these aspects of life impact the experience of disability and one's relationship with the healthcare system.

How we carried out the Needs Assessment:

In total, five focus groups were conducted which were led by peer facilitators, with individuals who self-identified as women living with mobility disabilities. In order to participate in a focus group, each participant had to meet the screening criteria: no previous history of breast, cervical or colorectal cancer; they had to be at least 18 years of age and living in the GTA. Women were able to discuss their experiences with cancer screening and share insights, barriers and facilitators of screening.

How the Focus Groups were conducted:

Each focus group was held at an accessible location, two at CILT, two at the Canadian Cancer Society, and we were asked to do one in the Region of Peel. At the beginning of each focus group, participants were given a written document, providing them with information on the background of the study, the purpose and design of the study, the length of the study, possible side effects and risks, possible benefits, compensation (each focus group participant received a \$50 honorarium for their participation in the study), description of the research team, the fact that their participation in the study was completely voluntary, and that they could refuse to answer any question at any time, and a confidentiality form which they were asked to read, ask questions about and sign.

Ground rules for confidentiality were mutually discussed by everyone before the actual focus group began. All participants were provided with attendant services, if required, and light refreshments.

Health Presentation on Breast, Cervical and Colorectal Cancer Screening Guidelines:

“There are two major components of early detection of cancer: education to promote early diagnosis, and screening.” (World Health Organization)

At the beginning of each focus group, before getting into the actual focus group questions, a small Powerpoint presentation was given on Breast, Cervical and Colorectal Cancer information with the current screening guidelines set out by Cancer Care Ontario.

Peer Facilitation, Process Checking & Take-Home Information:

Each focus group had two on-site transcribers using laptop computers, all focus group sessions were audio taped, and information provided by the participants was recorded on a flipchart as a method of validation. To ensure the emotional well-being of focus group participants, we ensured that a social worker or supportive staff person was available at each of the sessions if debriefing was required.

Each participant received a Canadian Cancer Society (CCS) bag with small gifts, and information about CILT, CCS, Cancer Care Ontario, Sherbourne Health Centre and cancer screening.

Highlights of the Report:

Major participant recommendations within our preliminary findings:

- More places with accessible exam tables and screening technology and on-site attendant care that are clearly publicized to the disability community.
- Strategic health messaging with disability-positive images and specific information for women with disabilities to support self-advocacy in accessing screening.
- More personnel to address disability-related needs and anxieties prior to screening procedures.
- On-site health education sessions for women with disabilities on screening guidelines, procedures and body-specific strategies for optimal care.
- Disability Training for Health Care Professionals and clinical staff at all levels on appropriate and clear communication, compassionate behaviour

and best practices.

- Creating safe and positive spaces for women with disabilities from LGBTTTQ communities, marginalized ethno-cultural communities, low socio-economic status and various ages.
- Patient-centred and integrated preventive cancer care that includes more options and less coordinating work for patients.

To read the full report, please visit www.cilt.ca/peersupport/Gateway_project.aspx