



Volunteering, diversity, and inclusion

Does your nonprofit organization wish to become more inclusive and diverse in its volunteer compliment? Do you need advice about how to achieve these goals? The information resources highlighted in this bulletin provide guidelines, practical advice, and valuable insights

about engaging volunteers with a diverse range of individual, cultural, and ethnic characteristics. These resources address the challenge of how to create communities where differences are valued and everyone is able to contribute to enriching their society and enjoying its benefits.

Being inclusive of individual diversity

Volunteers with disabilities

Barry Schmidl of Prince Edward Island's Council for the Disabled points out in his manual, *Simple solutions*, that negative attitudes towards people with disabilities create barriers that prevent them from making valuable contributions to their communities. Schmidl argues that if there is a will to include people with disabilities in volunteer programs, there are relatively easy ways to do so. The *Simple solutions* manual discusses how to remove 21 different barriers that prevent people with disabilities from volunteering.

Whereas Schmidl focuses on removing barriers to volunteering, Kelly Robinson and Barb Fanning of PEI People First demonstrate what happens when people with disabilities are able to volunteer. Their illustrated guide, *Stepping forward: Including volunteers with intellectual disabilities* uses success stories to highlight the value these volunteers bring to nonprofit organizations and the communities they serve. The guide also demonstrates the beneficial impact that volunteering has on the

volunteers (e.g., improved self-esteem and confidence) as well as on the attitude of the general public (e.g., increased respect, understanding, and ability to see the person rather than the disability). Robinson and Fanning conclude with practical suggestions for nonprofit organizations that wish to recruit volunteers with intellectual disabilities. This report is complemented by a fact sheet, *Step forward and volunteer* by Ann Wheatley.

Volunteers with chronic illnesses

Volunteering can also have many benefits for people who suffer from chronic illnesses that result in their marginalization. The Alzheimer Society of Canada's report *Engaging people with early stage Alzheimer's disease in the work of the Alzheimer Society* demonstrates that by engaging such volunteers, the Society is better able to serve its clients. The volunteers collaborate in designing programs and do advocacy work. The latter leads to empowerment and inclusion as perceptions of people with Alzheimer's disease and related dementias (ADRD) change. The report provides

"It took me a long time to believe in myself. Before I started volunteering, a lot of time people told me I couldn't do this and I couldn't do that... I could do it... I've been doing it [volunteering] for three years."
– Volunteer with intellectual disabilities

comprehensive recommendations for engaging individuals with early stage Alzheimer's disease as volunteers. These recommendations would also be useful to nonprofit organizations serving people with other chronic illnesses.


Similar findings concerning the value of volunteering for individuals with chronic illnesses are highlighted in André Samson's report, *Volunteering by people with HIV/AIDS or a major chronic disease: Issues and challenges*. Samson interviewed volunteers in Ontario who were living with HIV/AIDS. He found that volunteering alleviated feelings of hopelessness and improved the physical and psychological health of people with HIV/AIDS. Like the Alzheimer Society of Canada, Samson recommends that organizations assisting people with HIV/AIDS should encourage them to move from being passive recipients of assistance to active volunteers and self-advocates.

Low-income volunteers

Individuals with low incomes are often isolated because they lack the financial wherewithal to access their community's physical, social, and economic assets. Consequently, many nonprofit organizations run volunteer programs to assist individuals and households with low incomes. Sometimes, low-income clients become volunteers within the organizations that are assisting them.

The Social Planning and Research Council of British Columbia (SPARC) undertook a study of the motivations and experiences of low-income volunteers. SPARC's report, *What motivates low-income volunteers: A report on low-income volunteers in Vancouver and Prince George, British Columbia* indicates that volunteering has many benefits for low-income individuals, including increased inclusion and self-esteem, and reduced psychological stress. SPARC's report provides detailed recommendations for recruiting and retaining low-income volunteers.

SPARC also produced two fact sheets: *Understanding low-income volunteers* and *Low income volunteers: People to appreciate and accommodate*.



"It is our hope that the findings and observations of this report will be useful to other charitable and nonprofit organizations that are concerned with advocacy, inclusion, and empowerment, and would like to see their consumers become active self-advocates, not just passive recipients of care and support." – Alzheimer Society of Canada (2006)

Ex-offenders as volunteers

Physical and mental attributes are not the only characteristics that isolate and marginalize people within communities. Individuals who have been in custody because of criminal activities often find it difficult, on their release, to readjust and be accepted by society.

In *Ex-offenders as peer volunteers: Promising practices for community-based programs*, William Morrison, Cynthia Doucet, and Joanne Murray show that volunteering can help sustain successful rehabilitation. Having ex-offenders as volunteers also improves the effectiveness of transition programs that assist individuals who have completed their custodial sentences. Seeing peers as volunteers gives clients in these programs hope for their own successful integration back into society. Morrison, Doucet, and Murray provide detailed recommendations for recruiting ex-offenders as volunteers.

This report is complemented by two fact sheets by the John Howard Society of Greater Moncton entitled *Benefits of peer volunteering* and *Ex-offenders as peer volunteers*.

Volunteering and new Canadians

Coming to a new country where one does not have familiar family and community support networks can place considerable stress on new immigrants. Many of them seek help in adjusting to Canada by joining religious congregations of their own ethnic background. These congregations often rely on volunteers to deliver both religious and non-religious services.

To explore the role of volunteering in ethnic congregations, Femida Handy, Leona Anderson, and Lisa Diniz visited 34 congregations across

Canada. These congregations represented eight religions and 16 ethnic groups. They collected data via interviews, focus groups, and a survey. The survey results showed that 50% of respondents valued volunteering for the new connections made within their ethnic group and 45% valued it for the connections made outside their group with native-born Canadians and immigrants of other ethnicities. The report, *The role of ethnic congregations in volunteering*, emphasizes that volunteering in congregations facilitates the inclusion of new immigrants into Canadian society.

"When I came here I volunteered right away to teach Arabic at the church. I was able to put this on my resume and it really helped me get a job because I had Canadian experience." – New Canadian

Aboriginal volunteering

Aboriginal people have a strong tradition of sharing and caring for their family, neighbours, and community. They call this "helping out" and it is usually informal, unstructured, and occurs as needed. These traditions are under pressure for several reasons. One factor is the depletion of Aboriginal communities as members disperse and migrate into urban areas. There is also the historical legacy of the interaction between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, which has eroded traditional culture and practices. However, there is a recovery underway in both urban and rural Aboriginal communities. Many are revitalizing themselves through programs that involve a mixture of traditional "helping out" and more formal volunteering.

Revitalizing urban communities

Two studies focus on Aboriginal volunteering in urban areas. Paul Chorney, Jim Silver, Claudette Michell, Randy Ranville, and Carey Sinclair present a case study of the downtown West Broadway neighborhood in Winnipeg. This low-income

neighbourhood has been transformed from a high crime area to a vibrant secure community through active participation of community members, particularly Aboriginal people. They have created small neighbourhood associations that operate on a mix of formal and informal volunteering. This report, entitled *Aboriginal participation in neighbourhood revitalization* provides useful information for other urban neighbourhoods wishing to revitalize their communities.

In their study of community school volunteers in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, Josephine Savarese, Judy McNaughton, and Delphine Melchert show that the creation of school community centres based on a mix of informal "helping out" and formal volunteering can have a beneficial impact for the Aboriginal volunteers, the schools, and their local communities. The findings of the study are presented in a research report, *Women and the volunteer experience in the Midtown and East Hill areas of Prince Albert, Saskatchewan*.

Aboriginal volunteering in the Northwest Territories (NWT)

Lois Little, Sandy Auchterlonie, and Bob Stephen provide a comprehensive survey of Aboriginal volunteering in NWT in their report, *Continuing strong traditions: Aboriginal participation in the Northwest Territories' voluntary sector*. This report is accompanied by three other information resources:

- [Engaging Aboriginal volunteers in voluntary groups with territorial mandates in the Northwest Territories;](#)
- [Fort McPherson: A volunteer model;](#) and
- [Our stories: Stories about Aboriginal participation in the Northwest Territories' voluntary sector.](#)

These resources demonstrate how Aboriginal communities can be strengthened by a combination of traditional approaches and formal volunteering.

Another research project in NWT examined sport volunteerism in four small Aboriginal communities. The findings are presented in a report entitled *It's a noble choice they've made: Sport volunteerism in small communities in the Northwest Territories* by Richard Daitch, Mary Pat Short, Rita Bertolini, and Mike MacPherson. They found that sport volunteering in Aboriginal communities is often undertaken for the sake of the community rather than for the sport itself.

Aboriginal women volunteers

The Institute for Advancement of Aboriginal Women (IAAW) undertook a national research study on Aboriginal women volunteers. Their objective was to understand the women's volunteer experiences and collaborate with them to design a volunteer recruitment handbook for nonprofit organizations. Their research report, *Volunteerism in Aboriginal communities: Volunteer – who me?*, explains how the handbook was produced through a collaborative learning process that involved nine gathering sessions of Aboriginal women volunteers in four provinces and one territory. Their handbook, *Guidelines for the recruitment and retention of Aboriginal women volunteers* explains how nonprofit organizations need to build rapport with Aboriginal women and understand their culture if they wish to recruit them as volunteers.

"When I lived in West Broadway, I was very new to the community, so for me volunteering was a way to get to know my community. I believe strongly that a community is built by people within... not from outside." – Aboriginal volunteer

Resources Available At?

These and other resources published by the Knowledge Development Centre are available free of charge from our Web site: www.kcd-cdc.ca. They can also be accessed through the Knowledge Development Centre Special Collection developed by the Imagine Canada – John Hodgson Library. To search or browse the Special Collection, go to www.nonprofitscan.ca.

Knowledge Development Centre

Since its inception in 2002, the Knowledge Development Centre has funded 61 community-based and national research projects on issues related to volunteers and volunteerism. The research is designed and conducted by researchers working in nonprofit organizations and post-secondary institutions across Canada. The Knowledge Development Centre is part of the Canada Volunteerism Initiative (CVI) and is funded by the Community Participation Directorate at Canadian Heritage. The program will end in March 2007.

Imagine Canada

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ISBN # 1-54401-311-9

