

# So You Want to Volunteer? A Fact Sheet for Youth

Canadian Worker Co-operative Federation

Why should you volunteer? How can you get involved? Where can you get more information?

We asked more than 350 people involved in more than 40 organizations in Atlantic Canada, including young people between the ages of 16 and 30, why young people should volunteer and how they can get started.<sup>1</sup> Here's what they said.

## Volunteering: What's in it for youth?

There are dozens of ways you could spend your free time. Why should you consider volunteering as one of your spare-time activities? Because by volunteering, you can:

- Give your self-confidence a boost by helping others and being part of something worthwhile.
- Meet many new people of all ages and backgrounds who may help you in life and work.
- Make new friends, especially if you are new to a community.
- Add new experiences, responsibilities, and references to your résumé and make yourself more attractive to future employers.
- Learn new skills such as how to plan and run meetings and events, raise funds, communicate effectively, and work with others.
- Make a difference in someone else's life. Help teach children to spell or do math, read

to seniors, raise money for an important cause – the possibilities are endless.

- Strengthen your community and preserve your culture and heritage.
- Learn more about yourself, for example, how you relate to and cope with others in different situations, and your strengths and weaknesses.

## How to get started

Choosing a volunteer opportunity is like choosing which club to join at school or where to apply for a job. Before you can make the right decision, you need to know what will be expected of you, and what you can expect. Unless you know these things, you cannot make the decision that is right for you and you may end up being frustrated or feeling as if you are not able to fully contribute. So before you make a commitment to volunteer with an organization, ask the following questions.

### Ask the organization:

- How much time is expected of me – weekly, monthly, yearly?
- Will my out-of-pocket expenses (e.g., transportation, meals, supplies, uniforms, childcare) be covered?
- Will I be given training and orientation?
- Is there a mentoring program for youth volunteers so that youth get guidance and support?
- Will I have the opportunity to learn new skills over time so that I will not always be doing the same thing?
- Will the current volunteers welcome me in a non-patronizing way, recognize my skills, and allow me to contribute in a meaningful way?
- Are you actively recruiting youth?

<sup>1</sup> This fact sheet reports on findings of a research project called *Creating a Governance Culture that Nurtures and Values Youth* that was undertaken in 2004 by the Regional Co-operative Development Centre, in partnership with the Canadian Worker Co-operative Federation, Rising Tide Co-operative Ltd., and the Atlantic Co-operative Youth Leadership Seminar program. The research was funded through the Canada Volunteerism Initiative's Knowledge Development Centre at Imagine Canada.

- How do I know that you are genuinely interested in involving youth as volunteers?
- Are you willing to have at least two youth volunteers at the same time so that we don't feel isolated?
- Will youth volunteers be able to influence policy and change?
- If the organization has a board of directors, can we vote, stand for election, and be elected?
- Do you have written policies on volunteers and volunteering?
- Do you have regular meetings?
- Is everyone welcome to attend meetings?

### *Ask yourself:*

- What do my friends think about the organization? Will they pressure me into quitting because it's not 'cool'?
- Will my family and teachers support my volunteering and give me time off?
- Will I get credit on school/university courses?
- Will I be allowed to leave school/home early, or arrive late, because of volunteer responsibilities?
- Will my parents/teachers understand that when I have made a commitment to a volunteer organization, that I can't let the organization down?
- If I volunteer, will it help me to decide what I should pursue as a career or job?
- Can I balance a volunteer commitment with my studies, a part-time job, and my other pursuits?
- Will I learn new skills, or acquire new information, that will help me in other areas of my life?

## Where to get more information

The following Web sites provide resources that can help youth volunteers contribute more fully.

They contain information on how youth have been successful in making and changing public policy as volunteers; how they can help you become a better volunteer; and how you can learn more about volunteer opportunities, especially in the environmental sector.<sup>2</sup>

Charity Village  
[www.charityvillage.com](http://www.charityvillage.com)

Rural Youth Dialogue 2000  
[www.rural.gc.ca](http://www.rural.gc.ca)

Volunteer Calgary Youth Site  
[www.volunteercalgary.ab.ca](http://www.volunteercalgary.ab.ca)

Youth Zone, City of Ottawa  
[http://ottawa.ca/city\\_services/volunteerservices/index\\_en.shtml](http://ottawa.ca/city_services/volunteerservices/index_en.shtml)

Good Work Canada  
[www.planetfriendly.net/goodworklinks.html](http://www.planetfriendly.net/goodworklinks.html)

Volunteer Canada  
[www.volunteer.ca](http://www.volunteer.ca)

Canadian Heritage  
[www.pch.gc.ca/Cyberstation/html/ozone\\_e.htm](http://www.pch.gc.ca/Cyberstation/html/ozone_e.htm)

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<sup>2</sup> Web pages last retrieved May 19, 2005.