

# Why do Youth Get Involved in Community Volunteering?

Cathy Froment-Prévosto and Julie Fortier

## Youth and volunteering

Our research looks at youth involvement in recreation volunteering including the constraints that prevent them from volunteering and their motivations to become involved and stay involved in volunteering.

## Portrait of the young respondents

In the fall of 2004, 210 young people between the ages of 15 and 19 responded to a survey that included questions about what motivated them to become involved and continue volunteering. There were about the same number of boys (47.2%) and girls (52.8%) who responded.

The young respondents who had previously volunteered in a recreation context included 23.5% who had volunteered for an event, 19.1% for a recreation committee, 17.6% for a sport, 16.2% for a social activity, and 14.2% for an association.

For a majority of the youth (60.4%), the main volunteering activity they did was helping out. Others acted as group leaders or performed special tasks (21.6%). Some were members of an organizing committee (15.3%).

## Portrait of the responding organizations

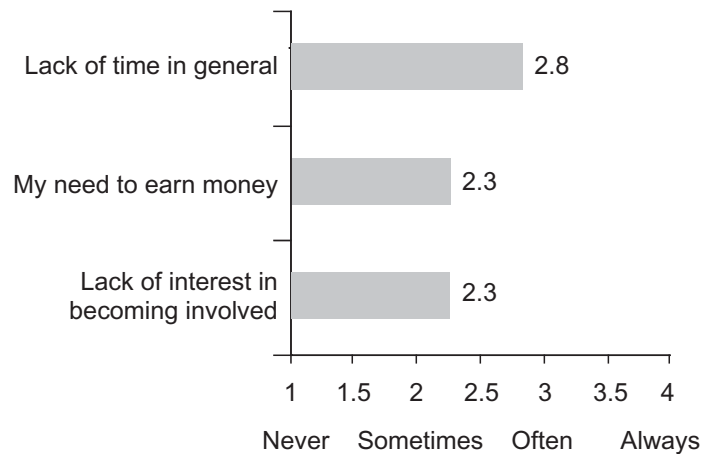
Of the leaders of organizations who responded to the questionnaire, 32.9% work in a municipality, 24.1% in an educational institution, and 38% in a nonprofit organization.

Of those who work in a nonprofit organization, 76.9% said they have previously welcomed young volunteers into their organization and 64% are currently doing so. However, youth volunteers account for a small proportion of all the volunteers for these organizations. Forty-three percent of the organizations explained that young people make up only 5% of all their volunteers.

## Youth perspectives on constraints to youth involvement

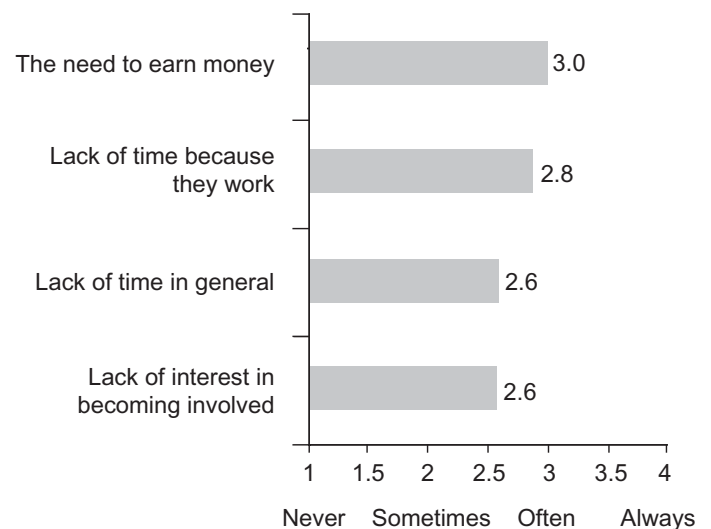
According to the young respondents, the main constraint on their commitment to recreation volunteerism is a lack of time in general (ranked 2.8 out of 4). Most youth between the ages of 15 and 19 are attending school, a

number of them work part time, and their social life and spending time with friends is at the top of their timetable (Royer, Pronovost and Charbonneau, 2004).



The youth also indicate the need to earn money (2.3) as a constraint. This need is justified, among other things, by their desire to be more financially independent and to have the means to buy what they want (Royer, Pronovost and Charbonneau, 2004).

## Organization perspectives on constraints to youth involvement



The leaders of organizations mention the same constraints as the youth. However, they place the need to earn money (3.0) ahead of a lack of time and they stress work (2.8) as the chief reason for the lack of time among young people. They also point to a lack of interest on the part of youth in becoming involved in volunteering.

### Motivations for becoming involved in recreation

The main reasons youth gave for becoming involved in recreation volunteering are to achieve something they can be proud of, to help, to have new experiences, to serve a cause that they believe in, to acquire new skills, and for enjoyment. Although youth indicated that their need to earn money is one of the main constraints on their volunteering, they do not become involved so they can get something in return (i.e. money, privilege).

### Principal motives for youth to continue their involvement, according to youth and leaders of organizations



As with the motivations for becoming involved, there is also a difference between the responses of the youth and those of the leaders of organizations.

In continuing their volunteering commitment, the youth attach great importance to enjoyment (2.7), learning (2.7), success (2.7), and independence (2.6). It is also important for them to feel useful (2.5) and to be with friends (2.5) when they are volunteering.

Young people attach more importance to acquiring knowledge and skills in continuing their volunteering commitment (ranked 2nd out of 16 statements) than do the leaders of organizations, who ranked this motivation 12th.

Based on our findings, it is apparent that no one motivation to become involved in recreation volunteering and to continue this activity can be clearly identified among the youth.

The responses from the youth who participated in our research are not very discriminating. Is this because they do not have a clear understanding of volunteering? Is the lack of personalized responses by the youth a reflection of unfocused teenagers? It does seem that the perception of volunteering by young people is not very precise. Education about volunteering may be useful for youth.