



Youth volunteering – a rich and diverse contribution to community

Welcome to the first Knowledge Development Centre bulletin!

Are you a nonprofit sector practitioner looking for ways to recruit and retain young people as volunteers? Or trying to find ways to engage youth in planning and advocacy activities in your organization? The information resources highlighted in this bulletin provide valuable insights and practical advice about engaging young people as volunteers.

The Knowledge Development Centre funds community-based and national research on issues related to volunteerism. The research is designed and conducted by nonprofit and charitable organizations and post-secondary institutions across the country. The Knowledge Development Centre is part of the Canada Volunteerism Initiative (CVI) and is funded by the Community Participation Directorate at Canadian Heritage. It is managed by Imagine Canada.

Young volunteers in rural communities

Nowhere is the struggle greater to recruit young volunteers than in rural areas because of declining populations. At the same time, rural areas are still dependent on volunteers to maintain essential services and retain a strong sense of community. If such voluntary support to rural communities is going to be sustained, then young people are a key resource, not only to replace older volunteers that retire but also to contribute their vitality and energy to their community.

Fran Locke and Penelope Rowe (Community Services Council Newfoundland and Labrador) discuss these issues in their insightful report: *Engaging young volunteers (age 15 – 34) in rural Newfoundland*. They explore the motivations of young people for volunteering which include personal satisfaction, fun, influence of friends. They also highlight what appeals to young volunteers: appreciation, respect, and recognition for their contributions.

The engaging young volunteers (age 15 – 34) in rural Newfoundland project demonstrates that it is up to nonprofit organizations to change their approaches and management structure to attract and accommodate young people if they want more youth volunteers. In their report, Locke and Rowe provide a series of recruitment and retention recommendations for organizations that want to be more inclusive of youth volunteers. For youth who want to volunteer the essentials are summarized in four two-page fact sheets entitled:

1. [Engaging young volunteers in Newfoundland \(Overview\)](#)
2. [A community profile](#)
3. [Key findings about young volunteers](#)
4. [Be a volunteer! Tips for youth](#)

“Youth can accomplish amazing things with guidance and support.”

“This was one of the most rewarding experiences of my life. I was involved with the same group of girls for a full year. It was rewarding to see them build self-esteem and confidence in the group setting as well as in their personal lives.”

Creating frameworks to involve youth

The findings from the Newfoundland and Labrador study are reinforced by the work of Cathy Froment-Prévosto and Julie Fortier (Loisir et Sport, Montérégie) in their detailed and valuable exploration of youth volunteerism in Montérégie, Quebec. Their report entitled, *“Walk beside me, and be my friend” Framework for volunteer involvement for youth ages 15 to 19 in Montérégie* closely examines current ways in which sports and leisure organizations recruit and work with young volunteers in the area. Froment-Prévosto and Fortier have developed a general framework for youth volunteerism that nonprofit organizations within the sports and recreation sector and beyond can use and adapt to improve their ability to attract and work with young volunteers.

Both young people and nonprofit organizations were encouraged to voice their opinions on the current status of youth volunteerism and about what needs to change to ensure its sustained growth in the Montérégie region. The youth in this study were very clear about the most important issues regarding volunteerism for them and what organizations should do to earn their support and long-term commitment.

However, to ensure youth involvement, organizations should:

- Value young people’s opinions;
- Listen to youth
- Provide support that is not directive, but allows youth to be creative in achieving their volunteer mission
- Respect young people for their achievements

The researchers provide a detailed annotated checklist of recommendations entitled **Courses of action for organizations** that will enable organizations to reflect on their current volunteer recruitment approaches and make the necessary adjustments to improve their ability to engage young people. In their conclusions, they point out that young people and organizations responded to the question “should the system adapt to youth, or youth to the system?” with the same answer: “both should adapt.”

Courses of action to attract youth

- demonstrate openness
- consult youth about their needs
- acknowledge youth volunteers
- develop strategies for cooperation
- provide training
- promote volunteer opportunities in educational places

Organizational cultures are important to youth

As with the Quebec study, the Rising Tide Cooperative of New Brunswick focused on what needs to change in the management and governance of nonprofit organizations in order for them to attract young people as volunteers. The report, *Attracting and keeping youth volunteers: Creating a governance culture that nurtures and values youth*, includes an analysis of two case studies of organizations that have successfully attracted youth volunteers.

The case studies of Fredericton Direct Charge Co-op, New Brunswick and the Women’s Network of Prince Edward Island emphasize an important aspect of youth. They show that for organizations to be successful in recruiting young people, they must support them to become leaders as well as volunteers. Both organizations have youth on their boards which ensures young people have a voice within the organization and can contribute to management and planning. Both organizations demonstrate that by nurturing and mentoring youth to become leaders, their management and governance structure is more responsive and supportive of young volunteers.



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What happens when youth 'have' to volunteer?

Many provinces have encouraged school boards to bring in mandatory community service to expose young people to the idea of civic responsibility: if youth experience community service early, it may encourage them to continue serving their communities through voluntary service as adults.

A research team from Wilfrid Laurier University has completed a study in Ontario on the impact of community service programs on students' tendency to volunteer once having left high school. Mark Pancer, Steven Brown, Ailsa Henderson, Kimberly Ellis-Hale, and Vanessa Buote have produced two practical manuals: one for students who have to undertake mandatory community service – *Getting the most out of your volunteer experience: A manual for high school students*, and one for schools and organizations that support student volunteering – *Helping students get the most out of volunteering: A manual for schools and voluntary organizations*.

The student manual includes peer to peer advice, adding to its value for high school students. The manual encourages students to reflect on their needs and interests and suggests how to find volunteer opportunities that will meet those interests.

The recommendations in the manual for schools and organizations are backed up with students' quotes to emphasize their importance.

The combined manual for schools and organizations highlights the importance of collaboration between the two in shaping volunteer opportunities that students will want to take up with enthusiasm.

Practical approaches to engaging youth in planning

The Canadian Federation of Sexual Health (formerly Planned Parenthood Federation of Canada) has developed a moderator's guide for holding group sessions with youth called, *"What will it take?" – Involving youth in policy planning and advocacy in voluntary organizations: A moderator's guide for focus groups with youth*.

The guide is based on the authors' experiences with moderating youth groups and it is a useful complement to the other information resources as it provides a series of practical tips for ensuring successful meetings with young volunteers.

"We called around to the different food banks in my area and just asked if they needed any help or if I could volunteer and most of them said yes. They all needed a bit of help, a lot of help actually."

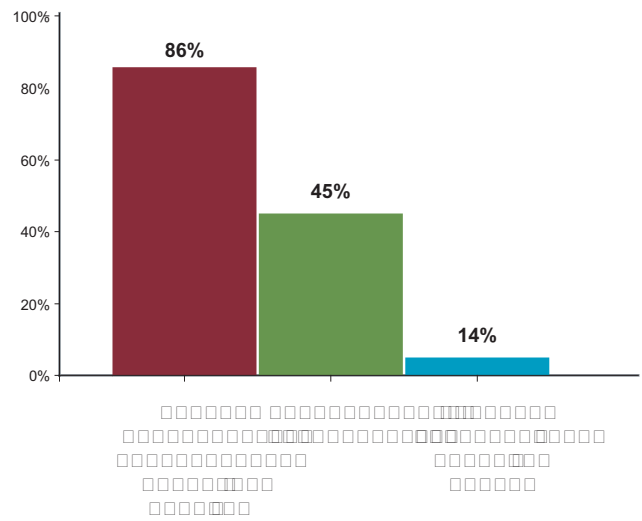
Organizations can be more responsive to students by having attractive volunteer opportunities that not only build civic skills but also provide a sense of personal achievement in an atmosphere that is fun to work in.

Families enjoy volunteering too

Family volunteering includes young people of all ages. Lois Lindsay of Evergreen, an environmental stewardship organization, demonstrates how valuable it is to cultivate family volunteering in her report, *Family volunteering in environmental stewardship initiatives*. According to Evergreen's survey, family volunteering is beneficial for organizations as well as families. The main motivation for families volunteering is to encourage civic responsibility in their children.

The report complements a practical guide for organizations that want to include families in their volunteer programs called, *Family volunteering; a natural for environmental stewardship organizations: Best practices booklet*.

Top three reasons for volunteering with family



Ways to engage families

- make a commitment in your organization to family volunteering
- design a family-friendly volunteer program
- be flexible with scheduling
- recognize young volunteers

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.

CVI Catalogue of Resources

Over 100 free resources, including tools to engage youth, families, seniors, diverse communities and employers are listed in the new CVI Catalogue of Resources, available at http://www.volunteer.ca/volunteer/pdf/Catalogue_ENG_FINAL.pdf. The catalogue gathers together for the first time resources developed by all the national and local structures that make up CVI. The resources are available online through links in the catalogue itself or can be accessed through Volunteer Canada's virtual Volunteer Resource Centre at www.volunteer.ca.

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