



By: Evelyn Pham

The start of a new year often means one thing—a new year's resolution. Whether it's about getting in shape or saving more money, your intentions are good and meant to have a positive impact on your life. So why not start with volunteering?

Volunteering provides the opportunity to give back to the community and enhance the lives of others. Through simple acts like reading to children in the hospital, preparing pamphlets for a worthy charity or helping immigrants adjust to their new life, your contribution impacts the well-being of your community.

Volunteering is also about helping yourself. According to the Canadian Mental Health Association, volunteering promotes personal growth and self-esteem. Helping others and learning new things allows you to feel good about yourself and keep you connected to others. You can also reduce your stress levels by volunteering because you focus on someone other than yourself, thereby interrupting usual tension-producing patterns and reducing stress-related hormones. Aside from all the health perks, volunteering offers a chance to explore new hobbies, build career-related skills, take part in fun and free-of-charge activities with friends, learn about community issues and set a good example for your family members. All of this and more results from one simple act: volunteering.

With so many organizations in the city, the search for the right volunteer experience can be daunting. The first step

Resolve to Make a Difference in the New Year

is to know what you want to do before embarking on a volunteer search. It's not only time-saving but it's also an opportunity for you to reflect on what you ultimately want to get out of your volunteer experience.

If you're tech-savvy and looking for instant results, the Internet is a great way to start. You can visit online classifieds and user-friendly, comprehensive databases to search for volunteer opportunities by location, type and organization. Another quick and easy option is dialing 211. This is a free of charge, twenty-four hour phone number that can be called within the Edmonton and Strathcona (482-INFO if calling from outside of those areas). Operators provide information and referrals to a wide range of community-related programs and events, including volunteer opportunities.

Newspapers also provide a wealth of volunteer opportunities. Scan community newsletters and newspapers for volunteer advertisements in the classified section. Free publications often feature sections or listings specific to a community. Give your local community league a call to find out more about volunteer opportunities close to home.

Students looking to expand their work experience can check out the Student's Association at their school by visiting the school's website to view online registries that list volunteer opportunities either off campus or on campus, or speak to a campus advisor for more information.

And if none of the above suggestions yield a promising volunteer opportunity, the next best step is to ask around. With approximately forty-seven percent of Albertans volunteering, chances are a neighbour, co-worker or friend volunteers—find out how they started, what kind of work they do and what organization they currently volunteer for.

Researching your options now and taking the time to find the right opportunity for you will be time well spent when

you find a rewarding volunteer experience that suits you best.

Visit www.volunteeredmonton.com to find out how you can become a volunteer. Volunteer Edmonton is a program of The Support Network. For more information, please contact Evelyn Pham at: (780) 732-6655.

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