

VIRTUAL VOLUNTEERING

By: Volunteer Edmonton

Becoming involved in volunteering isn't always easy. Maybe you don't get out of the house often because you're a stay-at-home parent or you've got mobility issues, making it difficult to get around. You could be a working professional who travels or has unpredictable work schedule. Or perhaps the charity or cause that piques your interest isn't located nearby. The solution? Try virtual volunteering.

What exactly is virtual volunteering? According to the Canadian Centre for Philanthropy, it means volunteering at a distance from the organization. Virtual volunteers can perform their duties in whole or in part over the internet.

A 2002 study by the Centre revealed that of 494 volunteer managers questioned, only one-third reported having any openings for virtual volunteers suggesting that virtual volunteering doesn't quite have a foothold in the nonprofit/voluntary sector.

But for Kibben Miller, virtual volunteering isn't a new concept. As a resident of Detroit, Michigan, he's been volunteering for approximately four years with a Winnipeg-based nonprofit organization as a virtual volunteer video editor. It's a position that provides him with the convenience and flexibility he needs as a volunteer.

"I was drawn to online volunteerism because it offered two very appealing opportunities not found in traditional community service work," Miller says. "First, my wife and I, because of career choices, have found ourselves spending limited amounts of time in any given place of residence. Online volunteering offers a chance to make a significant contribution to service organizations regardless of location and time schedules."

"The second aspect is the privilege of using my professional skills. I find it particularly gratifying to apply my specialized skills to support their efforts," he explains, adding that virtual volunteers don't need to have an elaborate computer system or work on technology-related tasks. In fact, many virtual volunteer opportunities offer administrative work—editing or formatting documents, creating spreadsheets, research, fundraising, moderating online forums and more.

Even those with less than computer-savvy skills can get involved in virtual volunteering. "Many functions vital to a service organization can be accomplished with modest computer technical and operational skills," Miller says.

By using any number of online tools like Skype, Facebook, instant messaging or good old fashioned email, volunteers and organizations can keep in touch no matter the distance or location. All you need is a little spare time and a computer to start making a positive difference in the lives of others.

To start your search for a volunteer opportunity, visit www.volunteeredmonton.com.

For more information or suggestions for story ideas please contact Evelyn Pham, Communications Coordinator, at epham@volunteeredmonton.com, call 732-6655 or check out our website at www.volunteeredmonton.com. Volunteer Edmonton is a program of The Support Network.

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