

GIVING BACK sets good example

By: Volunteer Edmonton

It's no secret that children learn by watching others, especially their parents.

For one local Edmonton mom, getting involved in volunteering was one way she could help set a good example for her children.

"We wanted our children to see life outside their normal environment and for them to develop a lifelong sense of compassion for their fellow man," explains Karin.

Research has shown that there is a link between early childhood experiences and the likelihood of volunteering later in life. The 2007 Canada Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating notes that more than half of those who volunteer had one or more parents who volunteered or had witnessed someone they admired helping others.

Children or teens who volunteer benefit from the opportunity to make a difference, learn about community issues, take on responsibility and gain self-confidence.

With husband Brad and daughters Becky, 15, and Mandy, 9, in tow, they set off to find a volunteer opportunity that would allow them to have direct contact with those who they would be helping. Karin admits it wasn't easy. "We sent emails and phoned quite a few places. We found that most places would not take children under 16 or they would only take families for special events and not on a regular basis," she says.

Finding a nonprofit organization that is able to take on an entire family can be a challenge, but that shouldn't discourage families from volunteering.

Informal volunteering—volunteer work that's done outside of a structured group or organization—like helping a neighbour by shoveling their snow or collecting clothes or money from friends and colleagues at school or work to donate to a worthy cause are just a few examples of how informal volunteering can be done by anyone at any time.

For Karin's family, their search paid off. A local homeless shelter was able to accommodate the entire family. "At Hope Mission, we found we could volunteer as a family as often as we wanted and see the people we were helping," Karin says, adding that they help prepare and serve meals, clean the dining room and do other odd tasks whenever needed.

With over 4,000 nonprofits in Edmonton, find one your family can be passionate about and get involved as a family—it's a chance to show your children how they can make a real difference in the community through volunteer work.

To start your search for a volunteer opportunity, visit www.volunteeredmonton.com or call 211.

To find out how you can become involved in volunteering, visit www.volunteeredmonton.com. For more information or suggestions for story ideas please contact Evelyn Pham, communications coordinator at epham@volunteeredmonton.com, call (780) 732-6655 or check out our website at www.volunteeredmonton.com. Volunteer Edmonton is a program of The Support Network.

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