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Volunteer Edmonton

Finding the right fit

Special to The Examiner

We've probably heard stories about it from our friends and family. In fact, some of us may have experienced it for ourselves.

A negative volunteer experience can have a huge impact on our desire to give back.

Volunteering is supposed to provide us with plentiful benefits rather than leave lingering feelings of frustration and resentment.

"Non-profits are stretched thin. We estimate that almost 60 per cent of Edmonton's non-profits are completely volunteer-run. That means those managing volunteers are volunteers themselves," explains Volunteer Edmonton co-ordinator Nana Thaver. "Sometimes those volunteers don't have the time, resources or training to manage other volunteers."

For those considering volunteering this summer, how can you make the most out of the experience and avoid organizations with less-than-stellar management programs?

Thaver suggests taking the time to research. Diving in head first if you've never volunteered before or if you're unfamiliar with the organization isn't the best way to ensure a positive, meaningful experience.

"It's important to spend a bit of time reflecting on what you want to do and what you're looking for in a volunteer position, because if you don't know, the organization won't know, either."

Start by asking yourself some basic questions: what kind of time commitment are you willing to make? Would you like to volunteer with other people or by yourself? Are there specific skills you would like to share with an organization? What skills might you want to develop? And what don't you want to do as a volunteer?

Organizations willing to work with a volunteer's needs and interests are often the ones that have long-term, loyal volunteers - one of the many good signs of an organized, established program.

Don't be afraid to ask questions before proceeding. "Find out what their mission is. Ask how your volunteer work helps the organization," says Thaver. "The more connected you feel, the more likely you'll stay committed."

Thaver also suggests looking for organizations that provide training, orientation and a written job description.

It may seem like a lot to consider, but the more completely and accurately you can answer these questions, the better chance you'll have of finding the right opportunity for you.

For more information or suggestions for story ideas, please contact Evelyn Pham at epham@volunteeredmonton.com, call 780-732-6655 or check out www.volunteeredmonton.com.

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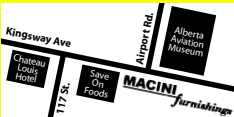
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