

Debunking the myths behind volunteerism

Volunteer Edmonton

Special to the Examiner

Ask people what they think about volunteering and you might be surprised by the variety of answers you get.

Everyone seems to have a different opinion about volunteering – what it is, what kind of work is involved and who is a volunteer.

Below, we've compiled a list of some of the common myths and misconceptions about

volunteering that sometimes prevent us from getting involved.

• **Volunteering means doing work for free**
It's true that volunteer work is unpaid, but the benefits and rewards received in return can't be measured in dollars.

Aside from a sense of accomplishment and making new friends, you'll also pick up a huge range of skills, knowledge and experiences that will help you in other areas of your life.

• **Volunteering is time consuming**
Between work, family, school and extracurricular activities, there isn't a lot of spare time.

Organizations recognize this and that's why many offer flexible or short-term opportunities where you could volunteer for a couple weeks or a handful of days. Think special events, festivals, fundraisers, marathons and much more.

• **Volunteer work requires certain skills, training or experience**

Some specialized opportunities do exist, but most organizations are simply looking for people who are enthusiastic and willing to learn. Volunteers often receive support, training and orientation, which means it's a chance to try your hand at something new or different that you wouldn't normally get to do in your day-to-day life.

• **Volunteer work is boring**

The days where volunteers only stuffed envelopes or filed papers are long gone. Today's opportunities can include working as a translator for an immigrant settlement agency, sitting on the planning committee of a fundraising event, answering the phones at a crisis line and more.

• **Volunteer work is only done with a charity or organization**

Volunteering is about helping others without the expectation of pay. That means mowing your elderly neighbour's lawn or driving a friend to their doctor's appointment is also considered informal volunteering.

Unlike formal volunteers, informal volunteers are often unseen and sometimes their work goes unrecognized. These hidden volunteers are simply lending a helping hand to their fellow community members and friends whenever needed. In the end, any volunteering makes a positive difference in our communities.

To start your search for an opportunity, visit www.volunteeredmonton.com. You can't help too little.

Look to this space to see the work that the city's volunteers and non-profit organizations are carrying out. To suggest a story idea, please contact Evelyn Pham, Volunteer Edmonton communications co-ordinator, at epham@volunteeredmonton.com or call 780-732-6655.

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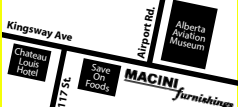
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