

Tips for finding your volunteer calling

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

We're talking about a negative volunteer experience.

It can leave a lasting impression. Volunteering is supposed to provide a volunteer with positive benefits – whether it's gaining skills, meeting new people or giving back to our community – rather than leave lingering feelings of frustration.

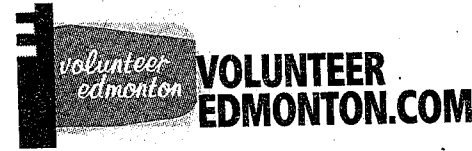
Volunteer Edmonton director Janice Bell has heard these stories.

As a former volunteer manager, she has heard about poorly-managed volunteers and organizations that simply did not have solid management practices in place.

"Non-profits are stretched thin. We estimate that almost 60 per cent of Edmonton's non-profits are completely volunteer-run which means those managing volunteers are volunteers themselves," explains Bell.

"It's not an easy task when you consider there is a lack of formal training and limited resources."

For those considering volunteering this summer, how can you make the most out of the experience and avoid poorly-run organizations?



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."

Start off by asking yourself some basic

questions: what kind of time commitment am I willing to make? Would I like to volunteer with other people or by myself? Are there specific skills I would like to share with an organization? What skills might I want to develop in a volunteer role? What do I want to learn?

Questions should also be directed to the organization.

In a recent article on Charityvillage.com, Donna Lockhart, a certified volunteer resource manager with the RETHINK Group in Ontario, said it's important to cater to volunteers. She emphasizes that volunteers want mean-

ingful opportunities that won't require them to just stuff envelopes, but instead use existing skills to gain benefits for themselves. Organizations willing to work with a volunteer's needs are often the ones that cultivate long-term, loyal volunteers.

Volunteer Edmonton suggests looking for organizations that provide training, orientation and a written job description. Without this basic information, it will be difficult to know what your role is.

Other key questions to ask include: what is the required time commitment? Will out-of-pocket expenses be reimbursed? Who is my supervisor? Can you be sued for any activities that you might be involved in as a volunteer?

The more completely you can answer these questions, the better chance you'll have of finding the right opportunity.

For more information, please contact Evelyn Pham, Communications Coordinator, at epham@volunteeredmonton.com, call 732-6655 or check out our website at www.volunteeredmonton.com.

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