

Fair connects students to community

For many young people, searching for a worthwhile volunteer opportunity can be a daunting and sometimes confusing task.

J. Percy Page high school is hoping to change all that by hosting its second annual volunteer fair on Friday.

The fair is designed to educate students about the benefits of community involvement, about the needs that exist and how to get involved by featuring approximately 60 different community organizations.

The hope is that students find something that matches their interests and allows them to gain new skills, but also provides a rich, meaningful experience.

Bruce Irwin, curriculum coordinator of the Exit Projects, says the volunteer fair is a great way for students gain an increased awareness of the kinds of

community needs that exist, and for organizations to promote their services and opportunities to a large number of young people.

"We want to give students a positive experience in the community," Irwin explains.

A volunteer fair, he adds, is an ideal way to engage students, especially if they are feeling unsure of where to start.

Charlotte Mitchell, a grade 12 student who attended last year's event, agrees that this helps make the process of looking for a volunteer opportunity easier.

"I doubt many of my peers are too enthusiastic to have to spend more hours than they have to spare after school hunting down volunteer opportunities," she says. "Having so many organizations in the same vicinity and with all of their information and application forms laid out



already makes those opportunities far more available, if not enticing."

Janice Bell, director of Volunteer Edmonton, hopes organizations see value in targeting youth as volunteers.

"Smart organizations realize students have a wealth of talents and skills to share. Being intentional about developing volunteer opportunities that will engage young people and tap into their desire to give back to the community is simply good business on the part of non-profit groups," she says.

Aside from browsing the booths and displays, students will be treated to a brief video

presentation and guest speakers who will talk about how volunteering can affect their community and why volunteering is worthwhile.

Although it is a one-day event, the school will continue to support volunteerism through its newly-launched volunteer database available through the J. Percy Page website. Organizations are welcome to submit volunteer opportunities suitable for youth, which are reviewed prior to posting on the website.

Once students are volunteering, the sky's the limit. Irwin believes it's the power of leading

by example that's a great motivator for students who have never volunteered.

"It's very rewarding to see other students talking about the benefits of volunteering and sharing their successes with others. That makes others see that they can do something and help the community" he says.

Have questions? Call Bruce Irwin at 780-462-3322, ext. 241 or email at Bruce.Irwin@epsb.ca.

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

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I wish I could enjoy a meal, but my teeth and jaw ache too much. People think I'm lazy because I need to take frequent rest breaks at work. I'd sleep through the night if the pain didn't wake me up at least once. Why should I be happy - I'm in pain!

Approximately 4 million Canadians suffer from some form of musculoskeletal disorder, such as osteoarthritis. Patients with these and other chronic conditions, including skin diseases or poor oral health, often suffer from chronic pain which, in turn, affects their quality of life and mental well-being. Researchers are working to better understand the link between mental health and chronic conditions such as arthritis and what can be done about it.

Experts:

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Moderator:

Jane Aubin
Scientific Director, CIHR's
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