

# Survey sheds light on our giving spirit

A recent survey from Statistics Canada reveals that many Canadians are giving, caring and involved individuals.

To understand how and why we give back to our communities, the aptly-named Canada Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating measures the rate of volunteering, donating and helping, and examines the characteristics of the individuals who take part.

Released every three years, the 2007 survey reveals that there has been growth in the total value of donations, the average size of donations and the total volunteer hours compared to the 2004 findings.

Other notable changes show that there has also been an increase in the total

## *It might be time to find a new and better way*

number of volunteers in Canada, rising from 11.8 million in 2004 to 12.5 million in 2007 and a four per cent increase in the total number of volunteer hours.

While these numbers offer a positive outlook, Volunteer Edmonton director Janice Bell cautions that many local organizations are still struggling.

### EXCITING, BUT ...

"While it's exciting that the numbers are going up, we also need to remember that the population of Canada has increased in the last three years, which may be influencing these numbers. In terms of the

local situation, the fact is that many organizations still need volunteers," she explains. "It's not an easy feat filling roles, considering that many people simply don't have time and many groups are entirely volunteer run."

Bell further points to the fact that the survey shows a staggering 75 per cent of volunteers cited lack of time as their main reason for not contributing more hours.



About half reported they were unable to make a long-term commitment. Bell says organizations will have to think long and hard about how they can make things easier for people to volunteer.

Given that most of the volunteer hours contributed in Canada come from a small group of volunteers – 25 per cent of volunteers contributing 78 per cent of all volunteer hours –

non-profit and charitable organizations could face a serious shortage of volunteers in years to come if this trend continues.

"With more and more people who have less time to volunteer combined with a small group of dedicated volunteers shouldering the work, this could result in serious consequences," she says.

Bell believes non-profit organizations should pay particular attention to one interesting finding from the report: for non-volunteers, 44 per cent indicated that they had not volunteered because no one had asked them to volunteer.

For organizations hoping to reduce the barriers to volunteering, finding ways to reach out to people could help increase participation.

Understanding the motivation to volunteer could also be a key factor. The survey looks at the reasons why respondents volunteered, and not surprisingly, 93 per cent agreed that the desire to contribute to the community was an important reason.

"It's crucial that organizations begin to examine more closely what barriers they are setting up for potential volunteers," Bell says. "Are they re-designing volunteer roles that have been around for a long time and are they re-thinking on an ongoing basis the need to begin to do things differently?"

### TAILOR ROLES

"Asking people how they see themselves contributing rather than trying to pigeon-hole them into a rigid pre-determined role is certainly something I'd urge."

Overall volunteers in the study reported many benefits to volunteering. The top cited benefit volunteers reported was that they had gained interpersonal skills. About 45 per cent of volunteers acquired better communications skills and 39 per cent gained better organizational or managerial skills.

The challenge for organizations going forward will be to think about how they can tailor their roles to mesh with the benefits volunteers themselves are naming.

Learn more about the survey findings at [www.givingandvolunteering.ca](http://www.givingandvolunteering.ca). For volunteer opportunities, visit [www.volunteeredmonton.com](http://www.volunteeredmonton.com). Evelyn Pham can be reached at 780-732-6655.

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