

Why Volunteer

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Why do we bother to volunteer? What's the pay off? We ask lots of "*what's in it for me*" questions in other areas of our life.

- What's in it for us to exercise a minimum of 20 minutes a day three times a week? More energy and stronger heart and lungs.
- What's in it for us to work overtime? Extra pay, if we are lucky.
- What's in it for us to own a four wheel drive in the prairie? A cool, desirable image.

What's in it for you to volunteer? Maybe, along with thousands of other Canadians, you have already discovered the answer. Did you know that three out of 10 Canadians over the age of 15 officially volunteer? Did you know that number is higher in Alberta? Four out of 10 Albertans over the age of 15 officially volunteer, and they have good reasons. Here are some of the benefits of volunteering:

1. You meet new and interesting people. Volunteering can expand your network of friends.
2. You have the opportunity to give back what you may have received from others. Most of us want a balance of giving and receiving in our lifetime. Many of us delight in the ability to return a helping hand.
3. You learn new skills that could bridge into a career. Volunteering is an excellent way to get around the discouraging line of "You don't have enough experience."
4. You have the opportunity to do what you enjoy. "My mom continues in her senior years to provide flowers for community events as it provides an opportunity to play with flowers she wouldn't otherwise have access to in the winter months.
5. You can increase your self confidence. Many of us dip a baby toe into an interest area and as we gained assurance we increase accepting responsibility and involvement.
6. You learn that you do make a difference. You go to bed at night satisfied that you **SHOWED THAT YOU CARE.**

When I hear the question, "Who cares?" I think optimistically of volunteers.

- Who cares about the ill, the elderly and the disabled?
- Who cares about disadvantaged women and children?
- Who cares about the homeless and poor?
- Who cares about human rights violations: sexism, agism, racism or discrimination?
- Who cares about the environment?
- Who cares about animals and their right to the planet?
- Who cares about global concerns and world peace?

By volunteering your actions clearly state, "I care."

Lois Wilson, one of our more outspoken Canadian senator's on the topic of voluntarism spoke at the University of Calgary Personhood conference in the fall of 1999. She encouraged those present to choose an area of concern and focus there. She said, "If you try to be all to all, little can be accomplished..." and, I add, there is such a thing as volunteer burn out.

At the age of 14 years Craig Kielburger of Toronto, Ontario read about the murder of a four year old Pakistan boy who was sold into slavery by his parents. Craig declared he was going to make a difference to the 250 million children around the world who've been forced to work as slaves. He started as a teen volunteer and is now a young adult at the helm of an organization called Free the Children. He's travelled the world, has written a book, met Mother Teresa and the pope, and is building schools all over the world. I remember a television interview with Craig talking to an eight year old boy called Jeffrey in the Philippines. Jeffrey had never seen outside the trash dump where he was born and has worked scavenging for food and retrievables every day, all day since he was able to walk and talk. Craig's aim was to one day have Jeffrey and other Pilipino children like him on day in school. Craig Kielburger serves as an example of making a difference and what was in it for him? He has quite a fascinating life.

Most of us have noted an arena of concern where we want to, will or are already have begun to make a difference. Perhaps you won't be travelling the world like Craig, writing a book or meeting royalty. However, if you have found your passion of concern you will easily be able to answer the question "What's in it for me?"

Over a hundred years ago Emily Dickson referred to, "What's in it for me?" in terms of giving meaning to life. Her poetry reads:

If I can stop one heart from breaking,
I shall not live in vain;
If I can ease one life the aching,
Or cool one pain,
Or help one fainting robin
Unto his nest again,
I shall not live in vain.

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