

A Community Profile

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Knowledge Development
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Background

Newfoundland and Labrador faces particular problems in volunteerism. Not only is the volunteer rate decreasing and the hours contributed by core volunteers increasing, the population, especially young people, is declining in every community. Unless new volunteers can be recruited and leadership skills developed, there will be even greater expectations placed on the engaged segment of the population, resulting in higher levels of stress and burnout and potentially in the shutting down of programs and services.

Engaging Young Volunteers in Rural Newfoundland included interviews with young people and representatives of nonprofit groups in five localities in the central region, an area of about 50,000 km² with a population of 100,000. Our communities were within 300 km of each other. In this fact sheet, we tell the story of our project in one of the communities (population 1,500, a decline of 12% from 1996 to 2001).

Organizations and young people responded enthusiastically to our study, with about 35 individuals attending a community meeting where we presented our research results and had a discussion about issues that pertain to young people and volunteerism. Some new volunteer connections were made at that meeting.

Training Sessions

At the community meeting, people expressed a need for training. A quick follow up survey with groups and young people resulted in CSC offering two workshops open to the community: *Recruiting Volunteers*, attended by seven people who represented nine organizations, and *Shaping Your Future Through Volunteering*, attended by 11 young participants, aged 13-26.

Interviews

Senior volunteers from three community groups – a youth centre, a recreation committee, and a heritage committee – as well as one young person who had made new connections, agreed to discuss the impact of the project on them or their organization. We have summarized some of the discussion below.

Ask New People

Participants said that only young people already involved get asked to volunteer. One adult volunteer was amazed she never thought to ask someone new.

“We were focused on heritage being associated with *older*. I looked around the room and said, “I know those girls would be interested in this.” I approached A and asked, “Why aren’t you involved?” and A replied, “Because no one asked me”, and that was an eye-opener. No young people involved in the past at all. Now they actively participate in monthly meetings. They are more computer literate...more creative, and organizational skills are phenomenal.”

“I got more volunteer positions like the Heritage Society, and I do car washes to help the Youth Centre. They asked me to do that from the meeting. With the Heritage Society we’re planning for Come Home Year, and me and Lynette are planning a sixties dance. And, we’re advertising on the community channel to take in old pictures from the 70s and 80s and make a DVD.”

“I went to our meeting and we discussed that we are serving the youth and it would be a good idea to have some input from youth...youth could come back and forth like a liaison person between the Youth Centre and the recreation committee. We just put out an ad in the youth centre asking for a Youth Representative and they nominated Leo to be on our committee.”

Promote Opportunities

A second revelation was that groups had not thought of recruiting young volunteers for a specific job, and all agreed this might be a good approach and found the development of volunteer job descriptions particularly valuable. Young people liked the worksheet on personal interests and how to choose a volunteer opportunity.

Gain and Contribute through Volunteering

“We encouraged youth to attend and they came to the centre after to talk about how beneficial it was. I helped them do up their résumé with volunteer work. They realised how much they had gained through volunteering. A lot of them hadn’t realised how much they had contributed to the community and organizations.”

“Their energy, positive outlook, their ‘conqueror all’ attitude is much needed among the people in the community. They are a valid asset that can shape their community in so many ways.”

Make Contacts

“We need networking...if we all fell under the umbrella of something and if the right hand knew what left hand was doing. The networking and collaborative approach to what we do as volunteers so we don’t duplicate services or go after the same individuals.”

“Tell a young person that through volunteering you can open many doors for future careers, gain skills, develop a résumé, make contacts that could be your employers...these days there is so much competition...by getting yourself out there you make yourself a good option for an employer.”

Get Input and Respect Opinions

“On the Youth Steering Committee there are eight youth...and the adults, we talked about making part of the youth centre a fitness centre but when we brought it to the table the youth said no, we want to leave what we have...they have a games room, homework haven and movie room...Had they not participated in the discussion we would have went ahead. We have to remember that they are young adults and their ideas are valid.”

Have Fun

“I think we need more organizations that relate to us ...stuff we can have fun with like with the Youth Centre, so young people will want to volunteer. And have ideas from us, youth point of view, so the whole town will be interested, not just older people.”
“We had a teen dance...and because the money was going toward the Youth Centre they all came out to support their own cause.”

Recognize Efforts

“If I give encouragement and recognition to youth, they are so much more willing to volunteer again. So appreciative of anything you can give them. Makes them feel they did a good job and contributed.”

“We pat them on the back and say great job. They like the recognition. They need to be sought after, and they need training, the type of things you guys offered here I think was an asset for us because when I met some of the kids in the corridor in school the next day they had such positive comments and said, “Miss, it was some good what we did last night,” and “When are we gonna start doing some of this stuff?”

Additional findings from our project can be found in three other fact sheets and a report published as part of this series, *Engaging Young Volunteers in Rural Newfoundland*:

- *Engaging Young Volunteers in Rural Newfoundland (Overview)*;
- *Key Findings about Young Volunteers*;
- *Be a Volunteer! Tips for Youth*; and
- *Engaging Young Volunteers (Aged 15 - 34) in Rural Newfoundland (Report)*.

More information and resources for voluntary organizations and anyone interested in the voluntary nonprofit sector can be found at www.enVision.ca and www.voluntarygateway.ca