

VOLUNTEERS

making your job more manageable

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How many times have you thought that you've just got too much to do in the school library information centre? We've all been there. School library budgets seem to be shrinking, while the demands on our time are increasing. How can we possibly succeed given these conditions, you may ask? I have found a way.

I recently took over a school library from a retiring teacher, and my current position is a 30% replacement. Without much time in the library, I've been forced to look creatively for help. I can honestly say that I could not have survived this year without my two dedicated library volunteers.

Library volunteers are a way to help satisfy the demands made on your library and, more importantly, maintain your sanity. By no means do I wish to suggest that library volunteers replace paid staff, but given the difficult situations many of us are in, they provide much needed relief from a number of daily tasks

Volunteers at the Forest of Reading® Celebration in May, helped the 4000 students have an amazing day (McCune Nelson, 50). When we're able to free up time spent on more repetitive jobs, we come closer to succeeding in our primary goal: educating children. Increased customer service is a good sign, even in a school library environment (McCune Nelson, 51).

Getting Volunteers

A variety of potential volunteer groups exist, the main ones being high school students needing volunteer hours, parents or caregivers of students attending your school, as well as retired people who would like to give back to their community.

Talk to people you know, and mention that you're looking for volunteers to help you. You never know where that news will spread. Personal connections can go a long way. To capture those possible volunteers in your school community, write an ad for your library and school newsletters, and/or Web sites. Make it eye-catching, more like a job description than a passive request for help ("Getting Help," 1). By treating the position seriously, you give the impression that it's meaningful work from the start. You might also consider hanging posters in the area, or placing an ad in the local paper (McCune, 40). Visits to local senior citizen homes and recreation centres might also get results.

By maintaining positive relationships with current volunteers, and providing them with positive experiences in the workplace, you can ensure they'll most likely talk it up to others they know. The more positive talk generated about your library, the better. Your current volunteers might just be your best recruiters. Word-of-mouth advertising is always the best.

Just like hiring for a job, you have the right to be choosy about whom you invite to work with you. Fewer, but more dedicated, volunteers can help streamline management demands. Criminal background checks for all volunteers working with children are now mandatory. Other considerations include insurance coverage and potential union conflicts, so consult your school board and union about volunteer policies.

