

# Update!

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## The Heart of our Communities

*In keeping with our plan to focus on career issues as they pertain to our graduates, this issue of Update! features two articles on volunteerism. While volunteering and career issues may seem unrelated, the two concepts do share an interesting relationship. As community organizations rely more and more on volunteer effort, individual community members are provided with countless opportunities to learn new skills, hone current ones, and gain experience and contacts that can serve them well on their career path. And perhaps more important is the recognition of the emotional satisfaction that accompanies volunteer activity: happy, fulfilled individuals bring that sense of satisfaction to the workplace and to their own families. That's a combination too powerful to ignore!*

It has been said that we are moving from the "Me Generation" to the "We Generation." And nothing attests to this fact more clearly than the growing spirit of volunteerism evident in communities across the country. According to 1989 census statistics, 27% of all Canadians do volunteer work of some kind, and there is reason to believe that number has increased over the past five years. It is estimated that Canadian volunteers contribute over one billion hours in time to voluntary organizations each year. Translated into a dollar equivalent, the collective value of this volunteer time works out to a phenomenal \$13.2 billion.

Reva Cooper, the Executive Director of the Volunteer Action Centre in Waterloo, is thrilled that the incidence of volunteerism is on the rise. "Principally, I think there has been a change in the way people see volunteering; they no longer hold the view of volunteering for strictly altruistic reasons. People now realize that both parties will benefit equally if the volunteer is suited to the position."

The Volunteer Action Centre (V.A.C.), celebrating its tenth anniversary this year, is devoted to encouraging and enabling citizens to serve their community through volunteer participation. The V.A.C. represents some 120 volunteer, non-charitable organizations – mostly in the health and social services area – in the K-W community. In addition to recruiting and referring volunteers, its staff is also involved in public education, identification of agency needs, and consultation and training.

"When people come to us looking for a volunteer position, we immediately book a one-hour appointment for them," says Cooper. "This gives us the time to discuss

possible placements, as well as to determine their interests, skills, motivations, and the time commitment they feel able to make." She also stresses that volunteer positions have become increasingly more interesting and challenging over the past few years. Budget cutbacks have meant that many agency needs are now being met by volunteers. "It is important that people look through our listing of 'volunteer job descriptions' as the first step of their appointment with us. It is categorized according to interest area, and many people simply do not realize the number of volunteer possibilities open to them."

According to Cooper, individuals also have different motivations for, and different ideas of, volunteering. Most people don't think of volunteering as serving on the board of directors of a service organization, for example. But many people enjoy this type of opportunity in their volunteer work; it gives them the chance to work with people they wouldn't normally have contact with in their everyday lives. At present, notes Cooper, the most popular volunteer placements are the ones in the workplace, where people can develop skills and make contacts. Here at St. Jerome's, we also rely on volunteers to help with the work of the Development Office, the Grads' Association, and applicant recruitment.

However, there is still a great need for people in what might be considered the more traditional one-to-one positions. "With the integration of physically, mentally, and psychiatrically challenged people into our communities, and the realization that the elderly live better in their own homes, the need for volunteer support for these groups is greater than ever," says Cooper. *continued pg 2*

### Portrait of a Volunteer Helen Heimpel

Campus Ministry secretary Helen Heimpel prefaces her comments on her personal volunteer experience by saying that she can't lay claim to being one of those people who volunteers for strictly altruistic reasons. Whether this is true or not, her many years of volunteer commitment truly exemplify the spirit of giving at its best.

For the past twenty years or so, Heimpel and her husband, Keith, have been involved in various capacities with K-W Extend-A-Family, Parents for Community Living, and the Ontario Association for Community Living. "The motivation for us to become involved was our daughter, Jennifer," says Heimpel. "When we realized that she was developmentally challenged, it introduced us to a whole new world that we weren't aware of before." The Heimpels did more than just become "involved." In fact, they both played a large role in founding and developing the K-W Extend-A-Family programme. Heimpel refers to this as her most exciting volunteer venture. It began with a small steering committee looking at the idea, and after much hard work, it became a reality.

Extend-A-Family is a programme whereby a family with a special needs child indicates a desire to cultivate friends – usually another family – for the child. A programme co-ordinator then finds a family in the community who would make a good match with child and family. "The



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