

LIVING

Volunteering pays off for youth

Volunteering not limited to seniors: baby boomers, students and working parents are pitching in

BY FRED SIMPSON
STAFF WRITER

Toss aside any preconceptions you might have that young people are lazy and selfish.

Or that the only people who volunteer are the elderly. It's a whole new ball game in 1998.

Although compassion is still the main motivation for volunteers, a growing body of young people is finding that giving has its own rewards, according to new research by Statistics Canada.

They do unpaid work to improve job opportunities and to learn new skills, while older volunteers do it because they believe in a cause.

Survey finds 14 per cent of young people said they had found jobs because of their volunteer experience.

The study found that volunteering enhances job possibilities: 14 per cent of those surveyed said they had found jobs specifically because of their volunteer experience.

"A lot of young people are trying to find where they are going in life or the type of job they want," explained Jane Robertson of Helpmate Information Service and Volunteer Bureau.

"Volunteering is an excellent way of getting yourself known in the community and perhaps paving the way for a career."

Some high schools already require students to do volunteer work as part of their curriculum.

Universities also require students planning careers in medicine, nursing and occupational therapy to do volunteer work, said Catherine Barley, director of volunteer services at York Central Hospital in Richmond Hill.

Not that pure altruism has fallen by the wayside in the rush for that career.

"We have a number of youngsters who just come in because they want to help the community," Barley said. "I am always amazed at the number of youngsters who

are like that. They are genuinely idealistic.

Volunteers in general, she said, are an "indispensable part of our team."

There are now 225 students and 325 to 359 adults signed up for volunteer work at the hospital, Barley said. Last year, volunteers performed more than 72,000 hours of service.

"High school students come after school, but a lot of them will come during the day, depending on their timetables."

CNIB volunteer director Debbie Robinson said a new, more enlightened breed of volunteer is on the scene these days.

"The days are long gone that everyone just comes in to be a volunteer," she said. "They know exactly the type of position they want and where they want to go."

The volunteer map is continuing to change, with the rapidly graying baby boomers ready to join in.

They will be seeking spare-time activity as a result of early retirement, either voluntarily or by company downsizing.

"They are looking for things to keep their minds active, or they may even be looking at building their skills for jobs," Robinson said.

"Or it may be simply a case of wanting to give something back to the community."

Statistics Canada found that 65 per cent of volunteers are employed and, increasingly, their employers are supporting their volunteer activities. One in four take time off to volunteer.

One of these is Bell Canada manager Joan Grass of Richmond Hill, who said her company encourages her work as an emergency liaison volunteer at York Central Hospital.

"The firm allows me the freedom on Wednesdays to go when I want to go so I can make my commitment at the hospital," Grass said.

"It has been encouraging me and my peers to give back to the community for at least the 15 years I have been employed there."

"In the emergency room, we

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STAFF PHOTO/MIKE BARRETT

Joan Grass volunteers as a greeter in the emergency ward at York Central Hospital.

Busy mom donates her time

BY FRED SIMPSON
STAFF WRITER

A sure-fire dress rehearsal for becoming a full-time volunteer in your retiring days is to run a business and raise a young family.

Just ask Monique Telmosse of Thornhill.

For the past two years, she had been combining her occupation as vice-president of The Retirement Options Group Inc. in Toronto with being a winning coach in the Thornhill Minor Soccer house league system.

"It can be difficult," Telmosse

acknowledged, "because you end up spending your whole summer outside the house."

Like almost every parent volunteer, Telmosse initially got involved because her two children, Julie and Patrick, decided to play soccer.

"They always need volunteers in some capacity in minor sports," Telmosse said.

"I guess people have a busy life because I had trouble finding someone to help me."

And busy is the right word.

Her dual chores have seen her spending two nights a week during

the summer on the soccer field and another two in her other life as an investment dealer.

Despite the time-consuming aspects of being a volunteer, Telmosse wouldn't have it any other way.

"I really enjoy it," she said. "I've found it's an excellent way to relax and forget about your day job."

"When I coach, I have to think about what I do. I forget about the financial world for a while."

And it hasn't hurt her enjoy-

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