

Strategy: *Involve yourself in your community and with organizations that are of interest to you.*

Many people get involved in their communities out of a sense of duty or a desire to help with certain local problems or issues, and that's important. Community involvement or volunteering by individuals is a key building block for the well-being of our communities and local institutions. However, community involvement isn't just beneficial to the community as a whole. It's also good for the individuals who pitch in and help out.

In fact, research shows that there are numerous benefits to volunteering, including:

- Greater life satisfaction and lower rates of depression (Grimm, 2007).
- The affirmation of one's values and improved self-esteem (Clary, 2002).
- Improved interpersonal and communications skills (Canadian Centre for Philanthropy (2004).
- Gaining job-related skills (Canadian Centre for Philanthropy, 2004).

We all need to feel a sense of purpose in life. That sense of purpose can come from several sources: family relationships, children, work, religious faith, or a connection to nature or specific place. Another important source of meaning comes from knowing that our actions have an impact – we are contributing in our own small way to making the world a better place. One way to achieve this feeling is to get involved in organizations and groups that serve important functions in our cities, towns, rural areas and neighbourhoods.

Canadians Care

Community participation is, in fact, woven into the fabric of Canadian life. According to the *2007 Canada Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating*, almost half (46%) of Canadians say they volunteer with an organization and even more – 86% – regularly provide informal help to friends, family members and neighbours.

Getting Involved

Every city, town and region has a variety of organizations that contribute to community betterment. These organizations provide services people need or want, such as places of worship, services clubs, community school groups, alumni associations and non-profit organizations. Even recreation and leisure-oriented groups, such as sports leagues, amateur choirs and community theatres, contribute to the well-being and health of our communities.

If you're looking for a starting point for your own community involvement, the place to start is with an organization or group that means a lot to you.

You could join a committee or club at your church, synagogue or mosque, serve on the parent council at your child's school, or, volunteer for an organization whose work you believe in. Or, perhaps you'd prefer to do more direct, service-oriented work such as volunteering at your local hospital, driving for your local "Meals on Wheels" program, or participating in a community care program for people who are sick. Contact the

organization directly and say, “I’d like to get involved. What kinds of volunteer opportunities do you have?”

If you are not sure what sort of volunteering you might be interested in, your local volunteer centre can help. Most cities and towns have volunteer centres (sometimes called volunteer bureaus). These non-profit organizations are dedicated to fostering and developing volunteerism and they also help connect willing volunteers with the organizations that need them. To find out if your community has a volunteer centre, look in the phone directory under “Volunteer.” For a directory of Canadian volunteer centres link to: <http://volunteer.ca/i-want-volunteer/find-volunteer>.

Leisure Pursuits

Another type of community involvement that shouldn’t be overlooked is the role of “participant” – becoming a member of a curling or bowling league, bridge club, historical society, running club, theatre group, or other group organized around a leisure activity or special interest. Whatever your passion is, chances are you can find a local group of people who share your interest. Participation in these groups is not only a source of enjoyment; it often leads to life-long friendships and connections, adding real meaning to our lives.

Resources:

For a related article in this series, [click here](#).

Volunteer Canada: <http://volunteer.ca/>

References:

Benefits of Volunteering, Canadian Centre for Philanthropy, 2004.

“Community Involvement: Opportunities and Challenges in Socializing Adults to Participate in Society”; Clary, EG and Snyder, M; *Journal of Social Issues*, 2002.

Grimm, R; Spring, K; Dietz, N (2007). *The Health Benefits of Volunteering: A Review of Recent Research*, The Office of Research and Policy Development Corporation for National and Community Service.

Caring Canadians, Involved Canadians: Highlights from the 2007 Canada Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating; Statistics Canada, 2009.